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and the Dialectical Image in the Music of Varèse,  
Feldman and Xenakis*

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**Towards an Aesthetics of the *(in)formel*:  
Time, Space and the Dialectical Image  
in the Music of  
Varèse, Feldman and Xenakis**

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**Joris André Odiel De Henau**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Music**



**2015**

## Abstract

This thesis aims to address the issue of the modernist musical artwork, specifically in terms of the *spatialization* of musical time, in aesthetic and music-analytic terms. Firstly, it focuses on the notion of *musique informelle* as it was expounded in Adorno's essay 'Vers une musique informelle,' (1961) and its place in Gianmario Borio's elaboration of this in terms of an aesthetics of the *informel*. Secondly, it proposes a further expansion of these aesthetics via a double strategy: a comparative reading of Walter Benjamin's critique of philosophies of time (including the work of Henri Bergson), language and objects, and furthermore a reconceptualization of both Adorno's and Borio's aesthetics in terms of a new theory of the object (as *sound-object*) in light of a new *reading* strategy. This reading is based on Walter Benjamin's notion of the *dialectical image*, which proposes a new form of philosophical interpretation. The theorizations of the sound-object and the dialectical image furnish a basis for a re-conceptualization of the *(in)formel*, allowing for the interpretative reading of the music of three composers in particular: Edgard Varèse, Morton Feldman and Iannis Xenakis. Particularly, the study of a number of their works, including *Intégrales* (Varèse), *On Time and the Instrumental Factor* and *Words and Music* (Feldman), and *Duel* (Xenakis), reveals what Adorno terms their (truth) content, in their mediation of rationalization and intuition. Finally, it is argued that these modernist works can in turn bring new insights into Adorno's aesthetics of the modernist work of art.



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*For my parents*

## Introduction

This dissertation addresses an issue of fundamental importance in regard of the modernist musical artwork—the tension between the temporality of music and the modernist emphasis on spatialization. This tension, seen both as an aesthetic and a compositional problem, was of central concern to Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, who attempted repeatedly to elucidate it, drawing extensively on conceptualizations of temporality elaborated by Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin. It is a central theme of Adorno's celebrated essay on the state of the musical avant-garde around 1960, 'Vers une musique informelle,' in which he sought to determine how modernist musical creativity might escape the impasse of integral serialism and the totalizing, rationalizing tendencies inherent in the utilization of dodecaphonic procedures. Although Adorno's concept of a *musique informelle* had a quasi-utopian character, which he himself appears to have regarded as being yet to be realized, it is the principal argument of the present thesis that this concept, if reconceptualized in the light of both the Bergsonian and Benjaminian ideas that profoundly influenced Adorno's thinking on temporality, as well as Adorno's own later thinking on time in his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, can not only yield fruitful new perspectives on the tension between temporality and spatialization in the modernist musical artwork, but also illuminate the compositional practices of such figures as Edgard Varèse, Iannis Xenakis, and Morton Feldman, whose music, as a manifestation of what one might describe as an 'alternative musical modernism,' had largely fallen outside Adorno's purview. Furthermore, I argue that the concept of the 'image,' with its concrete spatial and visual connotations, is pertinent to understanding these composers' work, and, crucially, how Benjamin and Adorno's concept of the 'dialectical image' in particular furnishes both a mediating concept and interpretational tool to this end, capable of revealing the objective 'truth content' (to use their formulation) of these modernist artworks.



Thus, my principal research question is to explore the relation between ‘musical time’, ‘musical space’, and ‘historical time’, as manifest in the work of these three composers, drawing on key concepts deriving from Adorno’s aesthetics, and Benjamin’s philosophy of history and theory of language. Adorno’s aesthetics bring together theoretical considerations and practical interpretations of works of art: as the latter often reveal their character as *riddle-like*, theories are necessarily unfinished and as such, cannot fully explicate the creative tensions inherent in modernist artworks. Adorno’s aesthetics considers these works as part and parcel of a historically and socially mediated reality which cannot be subsumed under a general theory, no matter how finely defined or how broad its concepts. It is precisely the fragmented material present in modernist works of art which create the conditions for an aesthetics of this kind.

The thesis falls into two parts. Part I comprises four chapters that are concerned with theoretical issues, focusing on *musique informelle* and Adornian and Benjaminian explorations of temporality and spatialization. Part II, which comprises three chapters, offers readings of the music of Edgard Varèse, Morton Feldman, and Iannis Xenakis in the light of the issues and concepts explored in Part I.

Chapter 1 examines Adorno’s 1961 essay ‘Vers une musique informelle’ from a historical perspective, and details pertinent aspects of his thinking on the problematics of temporalization and spatialization in relation to the modernist musical artwork in order to provide a context for the discussion that follows. Chapter 2 then proceeds to consider a notable attempt both to critique and to elaborate Adorno’s concept into an aesthetics of the musical *informel*—Gianmario Borio’s *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960: Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik* [The Musical Avant-Garde around 1960: Outline of a Theory of the Musical Informel], which was published in 1993. In spite of its importance, this text has received comparatively little attention in English-

language scholarship to date. In his examination of compositional *praxis* in the 1960s, Borio noted a shift away from an overriding preoccupation with pitch towards a new concern with texture, which led him to develop the concept of the ‘sound-object’ (a term which should not be confused with Pierre Schaeffer’s notion of an *objet sonore*,<sup>1</sup> from which it is distinct). As I attempt to demonstrate, Borio’s elucidation of certain features of avant-garde compositional *praxis* is richly suggestive of ways in which the reach of Adorno’s concept could be extended.

The third and fourth chapters pursue the implications of Borio’s thinking. I argue that his attempted re-conceptualization of *musique informelle* can be fruitfully amplified by drawing on Adorno’s late thinking on time in *Aesthetic Theory* and a number of other late texts, in which he revisited key concepts evolved by Walter Benjamin and was led to modify substantially his theory of the artwork. Chapter 3 takes as its starting point a central preoccupation of Adorno’s aesthetic theory, the problematization of musical time in relation to historical time, and attempts to explore the implications of the late shift in his thinking on questions of historical time and temporality more generally, but which Adorno did not have an opportunity to pursue specifically in relation to the modernist musical artwork before his death in 1968. In this chapter, I draw extensively on the work of noted scholars who have examined this late turn in Adorno’s thought arising from his reengagement with Benjaminian concepts, including Shierry Weber Nicholson, Susan Buck-Morss, Richard Wolin, Rolf Tiedemann, and Rainer Rochlitz. A central focus of their work is the Benjaminian concept of the ‘dialectical image’—which, as I shall argue in Part II, offers a modality of critical reading and understanding of the musical *art object* on its own terms.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux: essai interdisciplines*, (Paris, Seuil, 1966). Schaeffer defines the sound object (*objet sonore*) as different from the musical object (*objet musical*) in the ‘Historical Situation of Music’: ‘By sonic object I mean here sound itself considered in its *sonic* nature, rather than the material object (instrument or any device whatsoever) from which it comes’ (Pierre Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 23, footnote 3). For an in-depth study, see Carlos Palombini, *Pierre Schaeffer’s Typo-Morphology of Sonic Objects*, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham, 1993)

In Chapter 4, I pursue these ideas in relation to the temporal dimension of the modernist musical artwork, additionally drawing on Benjamin's theories of a language of objects and his critique of historicist understandings of time. On this basis, I propose a new understanding of Borio's concept of the sound-object which enables us to amplify the notion of *musique informelle*, showing how it can illuminate the treatment of temporality and spatialization in the work of Varèse, Feldman, and Xenakis, amongst others. The double reading of the post-war avant-garde musical work in this sense attempts to combine the analytic of the structural functioning of textures (as sound-objects) with the philosophical reading of the work as dialectical image.

The three chapters of Part II apply the theoretical considerations evolved in Part I to the work of Varèse, Feldman, and Xenakis in turn. Chapter 5 focuses on Varèse's handling of the idea of musical space, drawing on the research of, amongst others, the musicologists Helga de la Motte-Haber, Jonathan Bernard and Thimotée Horodyski. Varèse's anti-systematic approach to musical composition is critically situated in the larger philosophical context of the musical avant-garde and the central concern of this thesis with spatialization. Chapter 6 explores the notion of the image in the work of Morton Feldman, who developed the compositional technique of the 'instrumental image'. This study is heavily indebted to the exhaustive work on Feldman by Sebastian Claren. In Chapter 7, the music of Iannis Xenakis is examined in relation to the questions raised in this thesis concerning the spatialization and reification of musical temporality. This case in point, as a recent study by Benoît Gibson has revealed, is concerned with the notions of texture, sound objects and the apparent self-borrowing in Xenakis's work, allowing for a deepening of the reading strategy proposed in this thesis, that of the dialectical image.

As I hope to show, although Adorno scarcely engaged with Varèse's music in his writings,<sup>2</sup> and the music of Xenakis and Feldman was unknown to him,<sup>3</sup> their work can still be usefully considered in the light of his aesthetics, yielding rich insights into fundamental issues of musical modernism. Indeed, my decision to focus on these composers was motivated by my conviction of their potential to illuminate Adorno's aesthetics, precisely because they present a differing image of modernist compositional praxis which nonetheless occupies an honoured place within the twentieth-century musical avant-garde.

Given the complexity of the issues explored in this dissertation, it quickly becomes clear that they necessitate an interdisciplinary methodology appropriate to their heterogeneity, drawing on historical musicology, philosophical aesthetics, literary theory, historiography, and musical analysis in an attempt to elucidate this aspect of modernist thinking and musical composition. Furthermore, the choice of area and topic of research encompasses a number of questions of both (aesthetic) philosophical and music-analytic nature, requiring a double strategy. Firstly, a *reading* strategy, drawing on the critical-theoretical authors' own methods, while at the same time

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, Adorno writes in generally positive terms of Varèse's *démarche* as a composer who, being a trained engineer, was able to import 'technological elements into his compositions not in order to make them some kind of childish science, but to make room for the expression of just those kinds of tension that the aged New Music forfeits. He uses technology for effects of panic that go far beyond run-of-the-mill musical resources.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Ageing of New Music,' in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music. Theodor W. Adorno*, p. 194; originally in Theodor W. Adorno, 'Das Altern der neuen Musik,' in *Der Monat* (May 1955); GS 14 (1973), pp. 143-167; translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, 'The Ageing of the New Music,' in *Telos*, Vol. 77 (Autumn 1988), pp. 95-116

<sup>3</sup> This claim, however, does not disavow the contemporary affinities between these authors. For example, Xenakis's famous article 'Vers une musique stochastique'/'Auf der Suche nach einer stochastischen Musik' appeared in the same issue of the *Gravesaner Blätter*/Gravesano Review (Iannis Xenakis, 'Auf der Suche einer Stochastischen Musik / In search of a Stochastic Music,' in *Gravesaner Blätter*, Vol. 4, No. 11-12, (1958), pp. 98-111 and 112-122), as Adorno's equally well-known essay (Theodor W. Adorno, 'Musik und Technik,' in *Gravesaner Blätter*, Vol. 4, No. 11/12; republished in *Klangfiguren* (1959) GS 16 (1978), pp. 229-248; translated by Wesley Blomster, 'Music and technique,' in *Telos*, Vol. 32 (Summer 1977), pp. 79-94)

taking into account recent developments in the reception and readings of their work; and secondly, a method for analyzing particular compositions by a number of composers which does justice to the works themselves, whilst at the same time individuating the philosophical-theoretical framework through this practical method. The latter departs from traditional analysis, which is focused on the parameters, structures and forms of musical works. Adorno himself made the crisis of the traditional work-concept – the ‘jolting of the “work”’<sup>4</sup> – one of the central issues in *Philosophy of New Music*;<sup>5</sup> Carl Dahlhaus<sup>6</sup> observed the crisis of the musical work of art as an organic, autonomous ‘work’ in twentieth century music, whilst Gianmario Borio<sup>7</sup> and others<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, (2006), p. 29: ‘Jolting of the Work.’ ‘The transformations that music has undergone during the past 30 years have scarcely been recognised to their full extent. (...) The thought of future renewal, whether in the form of great and consummate artworks or of the blessed accord of music and society, simply denies what has happened and can be suppressed but not undone. Under the constraint of its own objective logic music critically cancelled the idea of the consummate artwork and severed its tie with the public.’ Originally in Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der Neuen Musik*, (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1949); translated as *Philosophy of New Music*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis, Minn.; London, University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34: ‘Today, however, this movement has turned against the closed work and everything that it implies. The sickness that has befallen the idea of the work may stem from the social condition that does not offer what would be binding and confirming enough to guarantee the harmony of the self-sufficient work. The prohibitive difficulties of the work, however, are revealed not in reflection on them but in the dark interior of the work itself.’

<sup>6</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Über den Zerfall des musikalischen Werkbegriffs*, (Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik, Vienna, 1971), p. 9-26

<sup>7</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993); Borio also cites Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Plädoyer für eine romantische Kategorie: Der Begriff des Kunstwerks in der neuesten Musik,’ in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 130, No. 1, (1969), pp. 18-22; Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the new music : essays*, (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, the work of Xenakis scholars such as Miha Iliescu, Makis Solomos, Benoît Gibson and Horacio Vaggione, amongst others, on the ‘morphology’, self-borrowing, montage and compositional technique in Xenakis’ music will also be considered. See Miha Iliescu, *Musical Et Extramusical. Eléments de pensée spatiale dans l'oeuvre de Iannis Xenakis*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Paris, Université de Paris I, 1996); Benoît Gibson, *The Instrumental Music of Iannis Xenakis: Theory, Practice, Self-Borrowing*, (Iannis Xenakis Series), (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2011);

understood this crisis to be necessitating the proposition of an analytic strategy, which draws on the (morphological)<sup>9</sup> analysis of *textures*, as the transformation of global as well as local sound complexes over time.<sup>10</sup> Textures in this sense are no longer defined by their place within the fixed totality of the work as before, but by the *transformations* they undergo. This method<sup>11</sup> is therefore not a reductive one – i.e. of temporal essences to which all elements of the work can be reduced or linked; rather, it accepts the insights into the changed character of the works themselves, as often open-ended.

I have already suggested that recent studies of Adorno's aesthetics offer valuable new insights into his enterprise, particularly insofar as they attempt to read his work 'against the grain' — an approach deriving from (post-)modernist theory.<sup>12</sup> One of the most well-known philosophers in

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Horacio Vaggione, 'Determinism and the False Collective. About Models of Time in Early Computer-Aided Composition,' in *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 7 (1993), pp. 91-104

<sup>9</sup> Miha Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 393

<sup>10</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Other approaches include *Experiental* and *phenomenological* approaches to the analysis of compositions, as proposed by Evan Jones for the music of Iannis Xenakis. See Evan A. Jones, 'An Experiental Account of Musical Form in Xenakis's String Quartets,' in Evan A. Jones (ed.), *Intimate Voices: Shostakovich to the avant-garde. Dmitri Shostakovich: the string quartets*, (Rochester, NY, University Rochester Press, 2009), pp. 138-156. See Chapter 4 in this thesis for critique.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, as I shall shortly note, a 'reading against the grain' seems to appear as a topic in itself in the work of several of the (secondary) authors considered in this dissertation. Any critical, systematic 'reading' of Adorno's work started with the work of Max Paddison's seminal *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*. However, we also based our own method on the insight of Peter Bürger's, Andreas Huyssen's, Jochen Schulte-Sasse and Albrecht Wellmer's work. Wellmer in particular inspired this alternative reading of Adorno, especially in light of the latter's understanding of Beckett's 'black' dramas. We presented a paper on the electroacoustic works of Iannis Xenakis, drawing on Wellmer. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Albrecht Wellmer, *Endgames: the irreconcilable nature of modernity : essays and lectures*, (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1998) and Agostino Di Scipio's work in this field. Xenakis's own understanding of time, history and musical temporality will be addressed in this dissertation, drawing on this preliminary work.

this regard and a student of Adorno is Jürgen Habermas,<sup>13</sup> whose critique of Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a case in point,<sup>14</sup> in turn causing a polemic.<sup>15</sup> Recently, Adorno's work has also been studied in this light,<sup>16</sup> in turn considered by some as prefiguring their 'deconstructive' readings; others see it in contrast to particular modernist and poststructuralist readings of his work.<sup>17</sup> However, I propose a reading of Adorno in conjunction with a number of relevant texts which attempts to re-contextualize them by situating them amongst other texts; in a sense I

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<sup>13</sup> See particularly Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1992); and Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie,"* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1968)

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,' translated by Thomas Y. Levin, in *New German Critique*, Vol. 26 (Spring/Summer 1982), pp. 13-30

<sup>15</sup> See Richard Leppert, *Introduction*, in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music, Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley, Calif.; London, University of California Press, 2002), footnote 75. He cites the most important actors in this debate as Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 32-39; Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'Dialectic of Enlightenment Revisited: Habermas's Critique of the Frankfurt School,' in *Reappraisals: Shifting Alignments in Postwar Critical Theory*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 99-130; Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'Back to Adorno,' pp. 5-29

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Rocco's reading of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, is critical of Jürgen Habermas's critique of Adorno and Horkheimer's work, and he challenges what he considers 'the critics' charge of 'totalizing' theory and 'performative contradiction' and suggest that what Habermas sees as an impassable aporia in theory construction is 'in fact a deliberate move to question the book's own (conscious) attempt to criticize the whole and so avoid the premature closure that marks all conceptual systems.' His approach rests on the one hand on an analysis of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of unified conceptual systems and on the other hand how in the structure of the *Dialectic* itself, a tension is set up 'between its parts that precludes reading it as merely a work of total theory.' See Christopher Rocco, 'Between Modernity and Postmodernity: Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* against the Grain,' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (February 1994), p. 71-97.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Agger, *A critical theory of public life: knowledge, discourse, and politics in an age of decline*. (Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Education) (London-New York, Falmer Press, 1991), p. 19-42; Rainer Nägele, 'The Scene of the Other: Theodor W. Adorno's Negative Dialectic in the Context of Poststructuralism,' in Jonathan Arac, *Postmodernism and politics*, (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 28) (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 91-111; Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics and Postmodernism*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991); Joel Whitebook, 'From Schoenberg to Odysseus: Aesthetic, Psychic, and Social Synthesis in Adorno and Wellmer,' in *New German Critique*, 58 (Winter 1993), pp. 45-64, as cited in Richard Leppert, *Essays on music. Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley, California-London, University of California Press, 2002), p.

follow the strategy of a *double* reading, as presented by the scholar Karl Markus Michel<sup>18</sup> and the critical approach of Albrecht Wellmer.<sup>19</sup> The interrelationships Adorno's texts will form include in the first place and above all his contemporary, Walter Benjamin.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Michel proposed a double reading of Adorno as 'Lektüre' and 'Gegenlektüre.' For Michel the 'Lektüre' include '1. Die Kunstwerke und die Kunst,' '2. Ästhetisches Urteil,' '3. Das Subjekt der Kunst,' '4. Ästhetische Produktivkräfte,' '5. Kunst als Natur-Geist,' and (palindromically ordered) 'Gegenlektüre': '5. Kunst als Partei,' '4. Kunst als Monopol,' '3. Kunst als Knoten,' '2. Kunst als Überfeld,' '1. Kunst als absolute Ware.' See Michel, Karl Markus, 'Versuch, die "Ästhetische Theorie zu verstehen,' in Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke, *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos, Konstruktion der Moderne*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 41-107.

<sup>19</sup> Albrecht Wellmer, 'Wahrheit, Schein, Versöhnung. Adornos ästhetische Rettung der Modernität,' in Ludwig von Friedeburg and Jürgen Habermas (eds.), *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 138-176; translated as 'Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity,' in *Telos*, Vol. 62, (Winter 1984-85), pp. 89-115

<sup>20</sup> Their friendship and professional contacts as well as the relationship between their work, has been documented by the following authors, amongst others: Gerhard Kaiser, *Benjamin. Adorno. Zwei Studien*, (Frankfurt, Athenäum Fischer Taschenbuch, 1974); Shierry Weber Nicholzen, 'Aesthetic Theory's Mimesis of Walter Benjamin,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass, The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 55-92



## **PART I: Musique informelle and the Dialectical Image**



## **CHAPTER 1: *Musique informelle* and the Crisis of the Musical Work of Art**



## Introduction

This chapter outlines Adorno's concept of a *musique informelle*<sup>21</sup> as a possible answer to the problems raised by the crisis of the modernist musical artwork, and, particularly, the totally reified integral serialist music of the 1950s. The genesis of this particular concept lies in Adorno's response to modernist tendencies in the visual arts in the 1950s, and specifically *art informel*,<sup>22</sup> a term coined by the French art critic and curator, Michel Tapié in his *Un art autre*.<sup>23</sup> The visual arts revealed a hitherto unknown aspect of modernism for Adorno, who had largely eschewed writing about them.<sup>24</sup> Another important element in his developing aesthetic in the 1960s was concerned with the work of Samuel Beckett.<sup>25</sup> Beckett's plays and novels, together with the

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<sup>21</sup> As to what *musique informelle* is, Adorno is adamant that it escapes definition, but he starts his essay by saying that it refers to 'Metzger's term, an a-serial music,' in other words a music which does not use the serial composition method. 'What is meant is a type of music which has discarded all forms which are external or abstract or which confront it in an inflexible way. At the same time, although such music should be completely free of anything irreducibly alien to itself or superimposed on it, it should nevertheless constitute itself, and not in terms of external laws.' The importance, for now, lies in the understanding of this concept as an *Idealbild*, a not-yet-existing type of music. From the vantage point of the present, it becomes clear that the *informel* he refers to stands not only in relation to a future musical conception, but the concept has a history itself, leading back to the *art informel* of the Paris painters from the 1940s, as well as the more contemporary *tachiste* painters.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Paulhan, *L'Art informel. Éloge*, (Paris, 1962); Simon Groom, *An art autre : Michel Tapié and the informal adventure in France, Japan and Italy* (London, University of London, 1999); Michel Ragon, *Cinquante ans d'art vivant : chronique vécue de la peinture et de la sculpture, 1950-2000: abstraction, informel, tachisme, cobra, art brut, nouvelle figuration, nouveau réalisme, lettrisme, École de New York, École de Londres, pop art, op art, cinétisme, etc* (Paris, Fayard, 2001); Galerie Heseler, *Un Art Autre : Tachismus-Informel-Lyrische Abstraction : Ausstellungskatalog*, (Munich, Die Galerie, 1985)

<sup>23</sup> Michel Tapié, *Un art autre où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel* (Paris, Gabriel-Giraud et fils, 1952)

<sup>24</sup> Adorno's most important theoretial consideration consisted of a discussion of the relation between music and painting, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei. Die Kunst und die Künste*, (Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1967); *infra*

<sup>25</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, "'Gegen den Trug der Frage nach dem Sinn.'" Eine Dokumentation zu Adorno's Beckett-Lektüre,' in *Frankfurter Adorno-Blätter*, Vol. 3 (1994), pp. 18-77; for a different reading of Adorno's Beckett-reading, see James M. Harding, 'Trying to Understand Godot: Adorno, Beckett, and the Senility of Historical Dialectics,' in *Clio*, Vol. 23, (Autumn 1993), pp. 1-22; and J.M. Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge: Adorno in Beckett,' in David Wood (ed.), *Philosophers' Poets*, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp. 177-181

concept of *art informel* opened new paths in the art at the centre of his oeuvre: modernist music.<sup>26</sup> The confrontation with what he saw as the totally rationalized (integral serialist)<sup>27</sup> musical work, resulted in the theorization of a new concept of the musical artwork as *musique informelle*. This concept not only consists of aesthetic speculations on musical form (no longer a top-down application of traditional formal models), but also on musical time. The roots of these ideas, especially the notion of spatialization of time and consciousness, lie in the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, and in Walter Benjamin's reading of these concepts in historical and philosophical terms.<sup>28</sup> Adorno's particular reading of their work resulted in a re-

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<sup>26</sup> Nels J. Rogers, *Theodor W. Adorno's Poetics of Dissonance: Music, Language and Literary Modernism*, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2001). As Rogers sums up the thesis's argument, 'Adorno's account of the historical dynamic of literary modernism is compared and contrasted with the historical dynamic of modern music, arguing that key concepts informing Adorno's understanding of the dynamic of modernism – artistic material, aesthetic autonomy and subjective expression--developed from his intimate knowledge of the music of the Second Viennese School.' She continues this reasoning by explaining that when Adorno returned to Germany in 1949, 'he turned to literary criticism as a means to disseminate his views on modern art to a broader audience than musical topics allowed. In essays on the literary works of Goethe, Hölderlin, Eichendorff, Heine, George, Kafka, Brecht and Beckett, Adorno describes [a] language which extricates itself from the means-ends logic of instrumental reason as music-like in nature or as playing over into music.' Adorno's understanding of the music of Schoenberg, specifically the 'formal dissonance' in these essays, according to Rogers, 'also indicate that Adorno had begun to question the central status of music in the postwar period.' Her thesis's central claim, however, is rather controversial: 'Adorno's literary essays are central to understanding why the trajectory of modernism outlined in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* runs from Beethoven to Wagner, to Schoenberg, to Beckett and not, in the latter case, to Boulez, Stockhausen or Cage.' In my thesis, this final claim will be confronted with Adorno's actual renewed interest and reconnection with the musical avant-garde, not simply as a wholesale rejection presented by Rogers. For a more nuanced view than that of Rogers of this phase in Adorno's thinking, see Rainer Rochlitz, 'Language for One, Language for All: Adorno and Modernism,' in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 27 (Summer 1989), pp. 18-36

<sup>27</sup> The term 'integral serialism' stands apart from pure dodecaphonic technique (which exclusively pertains to a series of twelve pitches). In the few cases I may have used the term 'serial' or 'serialist' alone, I always mean to refer to the former.

<sup>28</sup> See Claire Blencowe, 'Destroying Duration. The Critical Situation of Bergsonism in Benjamin's Analysis of Modern Experience,' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2008), pp. 139-158

conceptualization (or ‘redemption’<sup>29</sup>) of the reified concept of universal progress as artistic progress; in direct relation to this historical re-conceptualization in discontinuous terms stands the notion of musical time, especially in terms of non-linearity. However, as we shall see, Adorno found the possibility of a non-developmental temporal conception as *spatialized* time problematic. In the chapters that follow, I will draw on Benjamin’s concepts of allegorical time and the image to suggest ways in which of Adorno’s concept of *musique informelle* can be fruitfully extended without ignoring his reservations.

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<sup>29</sup>This idea of ‘redeeming’ a concept, which has seemingly entered uncritical terminological jargon, such as progress, will be revisited in this thesis. Another related concept, modernism, was similarly reconceptualized by Albrecht Wellmer: Albrecht Wellmer, ‘Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno’s Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity,’ in *Telos*, Vol. 62, (1984), pp. 89-115

### The musical work of art: the (pre-)history of a concept

Adorno's perception of the contemporary crisis of the modernist musical artwork arises from his understanding of the artwork itself, which in turn resulted from his engagement with a long philosophical tradition that originated at the end of the eighteenth century<sup>30</sup> in the philosophy of Enlightenment thinkers. One of the first important figures in the discipline of (philosophical) aesthetics, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762)<sup>31</sup> conceived of the artwork as a *monad* – drawing on a central concept of Leibnizian philosophy<sup>32</sup> – which imitates and represents. In this regard, the concept of *mimesis*,<sup>33</sup> often associated with Plato's<sup>34</sup> rather negative

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<sup>30</sup> For a book-length discussion of the musical work of art, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Work: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, (Frankfurt, 1750-1758), reprint (Hildesheim; New York, 1986)

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Aichele, 'Die Grundlegung einer Hermeneutik des Kunstwerks. Zum Verhältnis von metaphysischer und ästhetischer Wahrheit bei Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten,' in *Studia Leibnitiana*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1999), pp. 82-90. As Aichele explains: 'A. G. Baumgarten's foundation of aesthetics as a branch of philosophical reflection is itself deeply rooted in Leibnizian metaphysics. From this starting-point Baumgarten comes to a kind of monadological concept of the work of art, that gets now an inexhaustible and truth-representing meaning.' Aichele further argues that for Baumgarten, this truth of the work of art 'cannot be recognized rationally, for it is impossible for human beings to be aware of a beautiful object's "metaphysical truth," which can only be perceived by the senses as – to quote Baumgarten – "aesthetical truth."' Fortunately, it is possible to transfer some aspects of 'aesthetical' truth to 'logical' truth by means of a 'rational and scientific' hermeneutics. For Aichele, finally, 'the interest in art is therefore at the same time an interest in the cognition of the metaphysical cosmic order, and Baumgarten's aesthetics similarly are the first foundation of philosophical hermeneutics of art.'

<sup>33</sup> Mimesis in Adorno's work is different from mere *imitation*. For example, Martin Jay writes on the opposing conceptions of mimesis in 'Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 29-54. Jay writes that on the one hand '[...] in the much older Platonic critique of mimesis its danger was understood to be undermining of a stable notion of truth, which is threatened by duplicitous copies of mere appearances, here it is precisely the opposite worry that is at work: the anxiety that mimesis means privileging an allegedly "true" original over its infinite duplications.' In contrast, 'the competing intellectual tradition known as the Frankfurt School found much in mimesis to praise, [...] in its struggle to counter the reigning power of instrumental rationality in the modern world.' He continues by pointing to Benjamin's influential texts of 1933, 'On the Mimetic Faculty,' and 'The Doctrine of the Similar,' which subsequently led Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno to mourn 'the loss or withering of a primal and inherently benign human capacity to imitate nature as the dialectic of enlightenment followed its fateful course.'



conceptualization of music as an 'image of an image,'<sup>35</sup> is of note here as a concept with a history of its own.<sup>36</sup> A more *imaginative* concept of the image in Aristotle,<sup>37</sup> influenced a number of artists, including Morton Feldman.<sup>38</sup> For Adorno, art both resists and internalizes mimesis:

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Although they recognized the sinister potential of mimetic behavior when combined with the instrumental rationality it generally opposed - a potential realized precisely in the mocking Nazi mimicry of the Jews and duplicated in the culture industry at its most repressive - by and large, mimesis served as an honourific term in their vocabulary.' (p. 30)

<sup>34</sup> Edith Watson Schipper, 'Mimesis in the Arts in Plato's Laws,' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter, 1963), pp. 199-202: 'In the *Laws*, the last and longest and most laborious of his dialogues, Plato briefly outlines a theory of the mimetic arts (*technai eikastikai* or *mimetikai*) which develops further and clarifies what he has said about art in the third book of the Republic. The mimetic arts, mentioned at different times, include music, dancing, poetry, drama, painting, and sculpture; and so correspond to what now would be called the fine arts. *Mimetikai*, used of the arts, had a current and popularly accepted meaning, that of duplicating in another medium the appearances of things which could be experienced outside their representation in art. Many commentators and translators of Plato have assumed that he held this popular opinion as to artistic imitation, largely due to the account in the tenth book of the *Republic* of the painter from life who copies appearances.'

<sup>35</sup> See Barbara R. Barry, 'In Adorno's Broken Mirror: Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction,' in *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (June 2009), pp. 81-98; Barry states that: 'As well as reflecting fragmented social and political structures, music's shattered form was symptomatic of another conceptual dislocation in the context of art a rupture in the connection between beauty and truth, long considered to be intrinsic to art. Central to that concept was art's power of mimesis, where the visual arts created vivid images that shape our view of the world, and music evoked its inner reality as the narrative of emotion, conveyed by coherent design. So powerful was this view of art as intensified experience that it reversed the denigrating hierarchy of Plato's cave. Instead of Plato's lowly ranking of art as the 'image of an image' a reflection of life which is in turn an image of transcendent Ideas art becomes itself heightened reality. More powerful even and dangerous than music's famed ability to change human behaviour and affect even inanimate nature, music could attain an even higher level, as the direct experience of the Divine. Even if such an intense connection may last no more than a moment, its dazzling radiance, like the brilliance of the sun, throws everything else into shadow. Such a connection leaves a profound trace in memory and occurs when the musical elements have an integral bond, so that the work forges a vital link between composer, performer and listener.' (p. 82)

<sup>36</sup> Maria Villela-Petit, 'Art et vérité. La réhabilitation herméneutique de la mimésis et ses limites,' in *Les Études philosophiques*, No. 2, *Recherches en phénoménologie* (April-June 1998), pp. 219-236

<sup>37</sup> See Krisanna M. Scheiter, 'Images, Appearances, and *Phantasia* in Aristotle,' in *Phronesis*, Vol. 57, (2012), pp. 251-278. She argues that *phantasia* is the capacity to produce image and explains (perceptual) appearances: 'Images, however, are not merely pictorial for Aristotle. We can have an image of any perceptual experience, not just

The spirit of artworks is their objectivated mimetic comportment: it is opposed to mimesis and at the same time the form that mimesis takes in art. As an aesthetic category, imitation cannot simply be accepted any more than it can simply be rejected. Art objectivates the mimetic impulse, holding it fast at the same time that it disposes of its immediacy and negates it.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of music,<sup>40</sup> and more specifically musical performance, Barbara Barry sees Adorno's contribution to the history of intellectual engagement with this concept regarding the latter's insistence on interpretation<sup>41</sup> as a necessary condition of music. Performance 'aims to fill the lacunae left by notation as objective problem-solving; and its complement, interpretation, aims at decoding the cipher to convey the work with the immediacy of creative life.'<sup>42</sup> Whilst the study of the score may allow for the intellectual understanding of music, however, 'it is only through reproduction that music can be fully experienced.'<sup>43</sup> For Adorno, 'music's specific and unique criteria can only be fully expressed through performance. *The attempt to reconcile the divergent demands of music as writing (space) and music as expressive mimesis (time) Adorno calls the plight of music.*'<sup>44</sup> This

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visual perceptions. Furthermore, images do not bring about perceptual appearances through two distinct processes,' in *ibid.*, p. 252

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 6 in this thesis. In his essay *Between Categories*, Feldman refers to Aristotle's concept of the image as an image of time, understanding it not only as a visual concept, but as fundamental to understanding the unfolding of time.

<sup>39</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 285

<sup>40</sup> *Mimesis* in musical terms and in relation to Adorno's terminology, has been covered by scholars including Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also: Christa Bürger, 'Mimesis and Modernity,' in *Stanford Literature Review*, No. 3 (Spring 1986), pp. 63-73; Josef Früchte, *Mimesis: Konstellation eines Zentralbegriffs bei Adorno*, (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986); Martin Jay, 'Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaat (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass, The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 29-54; Richard Wolin, 'Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*,' in *Representations*, Vol. 32 (Autumn 1990), pp. 33-49

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 81

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81; [my stress]

relation between opposed artforms, as is traditionally thought, is central to the study of twentieth century music. Adorno's engagement with the idea of one art imitating another art – of temporal arts (*Zeitkünste*, such as music and poetry) and spatial arts (*Raumkünste*, such as painting and sculpture) – was the object of study in his article 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,'<sup>45</sup> to which I will return later.

Other concepts such as aesthetic beauty<sup>46</sup> and truth<sup>47</sup> were seen as ethical forces within the work. In brief, works of art were considered from a *philosophical* point of view as mediating<sup>48</sup> social and historical information,<sup>49</sup> seen as part of the work's *content*.<sup>50</sup> The Enlightenment philosopher *par*

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<sup>45</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,' translated by Susan Gillespie in *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1, (Spring 1995), p. 66-79

<sup>46</sup> It was important for Baumgarten to distinguish between good and bad art; good art was not only connected to beauty, but also to ethics.

<sup>47</sup> Kirk Pillow, 'Form and Content in Kant's Aesthetics: Locating Beauty and the Sublime in the Work of Art,' in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 32 (1994), pp. 443-459

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Max Paddison argues in his Chapter "The problem of mediation" that Adorno himself was very well aware of the problematic character of the relation of music to society and of the 'natural' and 'historical' within musical material. He suggests that the concept of mediation and musical material should be seen in a broader context of ideas. Mediation can be seen on three different levels: (i) musical works are mediated 'in themselves' (as the dialectic of construction and expression); (ii) musical material is culturally and socially mediated (as the relation of musical to social production, reproduction, distribution and consumption); and (iii) musical material is historically mediated. See

<sup>50</sup> Georgina Born, 'On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,' in *Twentieth-Century Music*, Vol. 2 (2005), p. 7-36: 'Music is perhaps the paradigmatic multiply-mediated, immaterial and material, fluid quasi-object, in which subjects and objects collide and intermingle. It favours associations or assemblages between musicians and instruments, composers and scores, listeners and sound systems – that is, between subjects and objects. Music also takes myriad social forms, embodying three orders of social mediation. It produces its own varied social relations – in performance, in musical associations and ensembles, in the musical division of labour. It inflects existing social relations, from the most concrete and intimate to the most abstract of collectivities – music's embodiment of the nation, of social hierarchies, and of the structures of class, race, gender and sexuality. But music is bound up also in the broader institutional forces that provide the basis of its production and

*excellence*, Immanuel Kant, proposed his theory of aesthetic judgement in the 1790s, separating ‘not only artists but receivers of art as well’ from ‘the mundane and particular.’<sup>51</sup> This judgement (originally not limited to the arts or any particular class of objects) should be made *universally*, by any person – suspending ‘all private points of view,’ experienced *disinterestedly*,<sup>52</sup> and ought to be *purposive yet without specific purpose*,<sup>53</sup> and should be based in a *modality of satisfaction*, a ‘reconciliation of all our mental faculties.’<sup>54</sup> Of the three types of art, music belongs to the ‘beautiful play of sensations’<sup>55</sup> and is considered to be transitory rather than lasting. The question as to whether and how it may furnish a basis for *knowledge* (of essentially a fleeting, isolated experience (*Erlebnis*)) in the work of art is an understanding, as we will see, Walter Benjamin subsequently developed. It is important to note here that Benjamin and Adorno criticized the universal nature of a number of Kant’s categories and conceptualizations.<sup>56</sup> As Adorno wrote:

To be able to say with good reason why an artwork is beautiful, true, coherent, or legitimate does not mean reducing it to its universal concepts, even if this operation – which Kant both desired and contested – were possible. In every artwork [...] the universal and the particular are densely intertwined.

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reproduction, whether elite or religious patronage, market exchange, the arena of public and subsidized cultural institutions, or late capitalism’s multi-polar cultural economy.’ (p. 7)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> ‘The first moment of Kant’s *Analytic of the Beautiful* asserts that our liking in the beautiful cannot originate from any interest and that in the beautiful ‘we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of reason (§5,52).’ But Kant also insists that the liking in the beautiful does not create any interest in the object either. [...] The requirement that a pure judgment of taste be devoid of all interest forms the foundation of Kant’s important distinction between aesthetic liking and the pleasure that may accompany moral judgment or action.” Ibid.; see also Lydia Goehr, *op. cit.*, p. 168

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 168: ‘If an object looks as if it were designed for a moral, practical or scientific end, and the viewer takes account of that end, then the viewer is not contemplating the object aesthetically.’

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 169

<sup>55</sup> Immanuel Kant, *op. cit.*, §6-16; see also Lydia Goehr, *op. cit.*, p. 169

<sup>56</sup> For Adorno’s study of Kant in terms of the artwork’s *autonomy* in particular, see: M. W. Skees, ‘Kant, Adorno and the Work of Art,’ in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 37, No. 8 (2011), pp. 915-933; James M. Harding, ‘Historical Dialectics and the Autonomy of Art in Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie*,’ in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 50, (Summer 1992), pp. 183-195

Kant touches on this when he defines the beautiful as “that which pleases universally without requiring a concept.”<sup>57</sup>

Coupled with necessity (of *pleasing universally* – each and every person), universality remains an ‘ineluctable concept.’<sup>58</sup> In Adorno’s view, conceptualizations external to the work of art, or the

requirement of the subsumption of particulars to the unifying concept transgresses against the idea of *conceptualization from within that* [my italics], by means of the concept of finality, was to correct in both parts of the *Critique of Judgment* the classificatory method of ‘theoretical,’ natural-scientific reason that emphatically rejects knowledge of the object from within.<sup>59</sup>

Judging artworks based on external, universal criteria, as Kant proposed, is problematic: even works which seem to fulfil all of these criteria could potentially still be uncritical works which appear as ornamental *cultural objects* (*Kulturobjekte*); consequently, there are no *bad* artworks for Adorno, as they would disqualify themselves as art. In this regard, modern art escapes the definition of Kantian art as universally beautiful: ‘Other works, indeed new art as a whole, contradict that judgment and are hardly universally pleasing, and yet they cannot thereby be objectively disqualified as art.’<sup>60</sup>

Adorno’s analysis of the work of art reveals its dialectical tension, without a third moment in which the objective and the subjective are overcome, radically situating the mediation in the artwork itself, as Peter Bürger has argued.<sup>61</sup> Adorno criticizes Kant by pointing out the latter’s

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<sup>57</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 165

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> As Peter Bürger writes: ‘[...] die Vermittlung zwischen Kunst und Gesellschaft ist nicht in einem Dritten (einer gesellschaftlichen Instanz) zu suchen, sondern *im Kunstwerk selbst*. Bei aller Gegensätzlichkeit ihrer ästhetischen Anschauungen sind Lukács und Adorno darin einig: Sie suchen die gesellschaftliche Vermittlung des Kunstwerks in diesem selbst auf.’ [‘The mediation of art and society is not to be found in a third party (a social instance), but in the artwork itself. Despite all the differences of their aesthetic views Lukács and Adorno agree:

objectivizing of aesthetics by means of universal conceptual formalization. Adorno wrote in this regard that

This formalization is, however, contrary to aesthetic phenomena as what is constitutively particular. What each artwork would need to be according to its pure concept is essential to none. Formalization, an act of subjective reason, forces art back into precisely that merely subjective sphere – ultimately that of contingency – from which Kant wanted to wrest it and which art itself resists.<sup>62</sup>

In the course of the nineteenth century, the *concept* of the artwork became a historically changing object of study in its own right. In her article ‘Being True to the Work,’ Lydia Goehr notes the newfound importance of ‘being true’ to the concept of the musical work (*Werktreue*) at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the writings of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, whose

Conception [of the artwork] corresponds closely to that accepted today. Thus, a musical work is held to be a composer’s unique, objectified expression, a public and permanently existing artifact made up of musical elements (typically tones, dynamics, rhythms, harmonies, and timbres). A work is fixed with respect, at least, to the properties indicated in the score and it is repeatable in performances. Performances themselves are transitory sound events intended to present a work by complying as closely as possible with the given notational specifications.<sup>63</sup>

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they look for the social mediation in the artwork itself] in Peter Bürger, ‘Das Vermittlungsproblem in der Kunstsoziologie Adornos,’ in Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke (eds.), *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 169; cf. also: Peter Bürger, *Vermittlung - Rezeption - Funktion. Ästhetische Theorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1979) and Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie,’ in Peter Bürger (ed.), *Seminar: Literatur- und Kunstsoziologie*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 204-21; and Peter Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 56

<sup>62</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 166

<sup>63</sup> Lydia Goehr, ‘Being True to the Work,’ in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1989), p. 55

Goehr's subsequent research on the history of the musical work concept develops this perspective even further.<sup>64</sup> Early nineteenth-century music critics were increasingly required to attempt to grasp the work itself, 'in isolation from any particular performance.'<sup>65</sup> Goehr refers to Carl Maria von Weber, who wrote that

In order to judge properly any work of art that depends on a performance within the temporal dimension, it is essential for the critic to have a tranquil and unprejudiced mind, open to every kind of impression but unscrupulously free of definite opinion or emotional inclination, except of course a conscious preparedness to accept the subject matter in question. It is only in this way that we can give the artist complete sway over our state of mind and enable his emotions and characters to transport us into the world of his creation.<sup>66</sup>

As to the ontological question of what a work of art *is* (as an object),<sup>67</sup> this is related to the work's historical and temporal aspects, its place in history or its historicity, and, moreover, to the historical mediation of the *regulatory concept*<sup>68</sup> of the work of art itself and its aesthetic systematization.<sup>69</sup> In opposition to this view, the understanding of art history as continuous

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<sup>64</sup> In many ways, this book's influence on our current work is invaluable, although doing it justice here is impossible given the limitations of the chapter's (and the thesis's) scope. Some of the aspects of the work concept's history in the oeuvre of Benjamin and Adorno will be further discussed in later chapters.

<sup>65</sup> Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 238

<sup>66</sup> Carl Maria von Weber and John Warrack, *Writings on music* (Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981)

<sup>67</sup> For an overview of the 'analytic approaches' to the work of art, as a definable object, see Lydia Goehr, *op. cit.*, 11-86

<sup>68</sup> This argument of the work of art as a regulatory concept, rather than an object with an identity, plays a central role in Lydia Goehr *magnum opus* mentioned above, specifically Lydia Goehr, 'Chapter 4: The Central Claim' in 'Part II: The Historical Approach,' *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 89-119.

<sup>69</sup> Alicja Helman, 'The Present-Day Meaning of a Work of Art,' in *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (1983), pp. 155-164. This article is an interesting attempt to synthesize different conceptualisations of the work of art, including music and the work concept in the twentieth century. It contains a number of positions and interpretations which attempt to deal with the crisis of the concept at hand. However, the crisis of the work of art is seen as a naïve reflection of choices made by artists in the work of critics. The crisis seems like an external, psychological

would rest on the flawed claim that one system must *necessarily* follow another one – in which the work of art is defined, either positively or negatively – simply because systems (or indeed non-systems) have succeeded one another. However, these systems, as inextricably bound to the idea of progress (and reaction), are themselves culturally and historically bound to the world in which we live, and to a world in which the creators of the artworks lived at the time of their creation.<sup>70</sup> So, although the concept of the work of art itself is bound to the genealogy of bourgeois society and capitalism, itself the result of historical and social processes (*vide* Marx), it is possible to consider works from an earlier time (in which there was no such precise concept of the work of art) as artworks.<sup>71</sup> However, it is impossible to see the concept of the work of art apart from these actual works, *a-historically*. In other words, to speak of works of art at all is to speak of the historical and social situation in which the concept of the work – with its privileged, non-functional role, as exemplified by Paul Valéry's *l'art pour l'art* – is allowed to exist as a meaningful separate category.

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problem; her critique is therefore not an immanent one. Helman fails to bring into relief the artwork as socially and historically mediated. Her conclusion is paradoxically that artworks will disappear shortly.

<sup>70</sup> See Jean Molino, 'Technology, globalisation, tribalisation,' in Jean-Jacques Nattix (ed.), *Musiques, une encyclopédie pour le XXIème siècle*, (Collection Cité de la musique) (Paris, Actes Sud, 2003), pp. 69-85

<sup>71</sup> As we will see shortly in Benjamin's critique, this position is rather more far-reaching than the naive experience of works from the past, as the original is inevitably lost. Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.' Lydia Goehr also criticises the anachronistic defining of objects from the past as artworks, especially those who originated in a time and place when such a concept was not yet established, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 114-115: 'This epistemological claim presupposes that certain if not all kinds of meaning and truth are dependent upon the existence of particular conceptual schemes. That presupposition allows one to affirm that, given that we have an explicit concept of a work, Bach composed works.'



### The modernist work of art in crisis

In the twentieth century, philosophers have pursued this quest for a better understanding of the artwork and how it is different from other objects. Heidegger,<sup>72</sup> who was critical of traditional aesthetics,<sup>73</sup> posits that a real artwork<sup>74</sup> reveals a 'world' and an 'earth' disclosing the world of people in history.<sup>75</sup> Although Adorno criticized Heidegger on his use of jargon (especially the notion of authenticity),<sup>76</sup> in terms of the artwork, both Heidegger and Adorno theorize mimesis as *mimetic movement* and how it parallels aesthetic judgment, particularly in the way it is construed in light of Kant's doctrine of the sublime.<sup>77</sup> Notable attempts have also been made to read the

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<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of a Work of Art in Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by A. Hofstadter, (New York, Harper and Row, 1971). This is a translation of Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, (Stuttgart, Reclam, 1960). For a discussion of this essay in light of the secondary literature as to question of what the 'world' and 'earth' in Heidegger mean, see: R. Raj Singh, 'Heidegger and the World in an Artwork,' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 3, (Summer, 1990), pp. 215- 222

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 215: 'Apart from explicating the nature and the role of artworks and their connection with the world, truth and historical unfolding of Being, Heidegger also presents a critique of traditional aesthetics in *The Origin of a Work of Art*. Traditional aesthetics is similarly taken to task in his interpretation of Nietzsche's "will to power" as art in Nietzsche, Vol. 1.2 According to Heidegger, the field of aesthetics has been unable to rise above the bifurcation of reality into subjects and objects and the use of the worn out concepts of matter and form in its attempts to define the nature of artworks.'

<sup>74</sup> For Heidegger, an 'artwork' (*Kunstwerk*) is different from a mere 'piece of art' (*Kunststück*), which shows a simple artisan quality, or is part of larger collection. See Rudi Visker, 'Kunst en grofvuil: Heidegger, Levinas en de overgang ['Art and Bulky Rubbish: Heidegger, Levinas and the Transition'],' in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Autumn 2006), pp. 583-612

<sup>75</sup> Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 217: 'A fuller interpretation of Heidegger's assertions would be that an artwork discloses the world of a (historical) people, and at the same time shows the nature of human being's (worlding) world. It shows us how the world historically worlds, in showing how it has worlded for "this people." It performed an ontological function for the people who installed it, and it gives us a glimpse of their world in a different way.'

<sup>76</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1964); GS 6 (1973), pp. 413-526; translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, foreword by Trent Schroyer, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973)

<sup>77</sup> Tom Huhn, 'The Movement of Mimesis: Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" in Relation to Adorno and Lyotard,' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (1996), pp. 45-69

artwork as a (utopian) model for political action,<sup>78</sup> for example, by Berthold Brecht, Hanns Eisler, and Georg Lukács,<sup>79</sup> although these are inherently problematic. Walter Benjamin for one

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<sup>78</sup> See for example, Bret R. Wheeler, 'Modernist Re-enchantments II: From Aestheticized Politics to the Artwork,' in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), pp. 113-126. Wheeler's reading of these theorists is itself an example of a politicisation of the artwork. From an almost impossibly problematic beginning of the article, Wheeler states that 'In its youth, indeed, the union of art and politics excited a vast spectrum of intellectuals with a promise of redemption from the cold rationality of a disenchanted world. Sociologists, philosophers, even jurists and artists discerned in the work of art the instantiation of an original unity of human agents-a political community untroubled by fragmentation, mediated relations, and politics absent moral agency.' In the rest of this highly problematic article, Wheeler reads in the (modernist) artwork a redemption that is 'no longer transcendent,' but immanent, by referring to Max Weber's dictum: "Sie übernimmt die Funktion einer, gleichviel wie gedeuteten, innerweltlichen Erlösung." ("It takes over the function of in as how many meaningful ways, an innerworldly [immanently] redemption." [My translation]) The redemption once anticipated by religious worldviews was now preserved in art. This was consonant with the demands of a modern world – a secular form of integration and an immanent rather than transcendent medium of interaction. Thus the alternative political modality proffered by the aesthetic operations of the artwork.' Although this could have been an interesting search for the links and differences between politics and (modernist) artworks, Wheeler simplifies, misrepresents and ultimately misunderstands the critical theorists' work to a point of meaninglessness, for example, when he writes that 'in the modernist artwork the heterogeneous subject and object of the world of experience come to share the world of the artwork from which they are also only analytically distinct. In the artwork subject and object, medium and material, form and content have become homogenous. Artistic beauty is thus the shadow in the cave [referring to Plato], indicating a transcendental agreement of subject and object, a philosophical truth about existence that finds its home nowhere but in the work of art.' p. 116 This is problematic, as it destroys precisely the dialectic between the different terms, especially between subject and object, as we will see in this thesis. The 'transcendental agreement' is also false. He totalises the concept of autonomy – autonomy, according to him, being 'the ability to exist (or to 'mean') without norms or standards except those given to itself in the very activity of signification.' The problem here is that autonomy in this way escapes the dialectic once more: there is no autonomy at work in the artwork if the social (or political) context does not allow for it, which indicates a mediation at the level of the modern artwork and its uncomfortable place as a non-functional entity. Wheeler misunderstands this completely. His image of redemption in the artwork ['Hence the artwork, in Lukács's terms that would have also agreed in slight variation with Adorno's, is a mimetic reproduction of a redeemed world in which subject and object are homogeneously conceived, tending toward one another'] would then indicate a false work, and would therefore not even be regarded as an artwork as such. He tries hard to show how what he calls the 'frame' of the artwork as different from its utopian core ('At the same time, however, the frame of the work, which mimics the tragic unattainability of this redemption, accompanies this formal mimetic operation occurring on the level of the work's signification.' He is also incorrect when he states on p. 117 'within the artwork, the constituents of the work's significance manifest a utopian political hope, a hope for

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an association that is not falsely reconciled to the whole – to the semblance – by an anterior concept or rule. However, this uncoerced, and hence also unreconciled whole emerges not from an indeterminate space, i.e., within a world of unconditioned action or voluntaristic practice. Rather, the determinacy of this emancipatory irreconcilability is the boundary, or the frame, of the artwork.’ It is also not clear what Wheeler means by ‘signification’; in the case it refers to the meaning of the artwork, then the idea that ‘signification occurs almost exclusively at the level of form rather than referential content [what is meant by ‘referential content’ is also not clear] is problematic. Above all, it is false to state that subject and object are homogenous in the modernist artwork, especially in relation to Adorno’s aesthetic theory. As I will argue in this thesis, in the avant-garde artwork, if not all modernist artworks worthy of that name, the tension is not between a resolved ‘utopian’ mimetic core and its unreconciled ‘frame’, but between fragmented material and the dissolution of form – which could be better understood, for example, in light of Adorno’s concept of *musique informelle*. If it is at all correct what Wheeler portends, that ‘aesthetics offered redemption as an artistic illusion’, then it can only be seen in a negative way, or it would be a travesty to the work of Adorno, if not of Lukács. Adorno clearly states that the artwork as an illusion is not one of utopian reconciliation, neither at its core, nor negatively in its ‘frame’. For example, Wheeler argues that Lukács’s (failed) *Habilitation* in 1918 ‘articulated a vision of the artwork as a negative model for politics. In the artwork the figural space of which the work consists is determinate; it has discrete borders that distinguish it from the world of reality. But within these borders there is both a freedom for the particular constituent parts of the work and a harmony in their common goal of bringing forth a semblance, an *ideal aesthetic object* [my stress] that the artwork seems to be representing.’ It is this misunderstanding which undoes the earlier ‘negative model’ interpretation of the artwork for political reasons, which is highly problematic in itself. The modernist artwork is never, in whatever sense of the word, an ideal aesthetic object. However, Wheeler compounds his error in the next sentence: ‘This non-coerced community of particulars is possible by virtue of what Adorno would later call the ‘subjektive Paradoxie von Kunst: Blindes – den Ausdruck – aus Reflexion – durch Form – zu produzieren; das Blinde nicht zu rationalisieren sondern ästhetisch überhaupt herzustellen.’ (‘the subjective paradox of art – blindly, to produce an expression – from reflection – through form; not to rationalize this blind [object], but to make [it] aesthetic at all.’ [My translation]) He concludes incorrectly and somewhat bizarrely, that ‘So it was that aesthetics offered redemption as an artistic illusion. And with this we have ascertained a bipartite truth for modernism: first, that there was a faculty, an aesthetic one, that putatively offered access to the world and allowed agents to interact immediately (hence, it is a faculty that redeems politics from liberalism); and, second, that this faculty is concretized in that artwork, as the artwork both signifies without extraneous mediation and also *mimics* – by virtue of it being a world set apart – a perfect political community, even in a seemingly abstruse and intensive form as a fiction.’ If modernist art, following Adorno and Benjamin, has anything to say, it is the mediation of fragmented and contradictory elements of societal upheaval, rather than Wheeler’s reading of it as the ideal of utopia in a ‘frame’ of unreconciliation. In that sense, redemption can not be found simply in the artwork in the way Wheeler posits in his reading of these theorists.

expands on Marx's work,<sup>80</sup> especially the relation between capitalism and the work of art's potential for political action, in the second version of his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, right from the opening paragraph:

Marx adopted an approach which gave his investigations prognostic value. [...] Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements. [...] Theses defining the developmental tendencies of art can therefore contribute to the political struggle in ways that it would be a mistake to underestimate.<sup>81</sup>

Of twentieth-century philosophers who engaged with concepts of the artwork, however, Adorno is unquestionably one of the most important, especially with regard to the works of the musical post-war avant-garde. Through the contact with contemporary composers from Schoenberg and Webern onwards, but especially the composers of the 1950s and 1960s, Adorno came to occupy an influential position, both as an authority and a critic, especially through his involvement in the Darmstadt *Ferienkursen*.<sup>82</sup> However, the reception history of his ideas is highly complex.

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<sup>79</sup> For an excellent overview of the debates by these authors on the intersection of aesthetics and politics, see the anthology: Ronald Taylor (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno*, with an afterword by Fredric Jameson, (London, NLB, 1977; Verso, 1980)

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin also explains some of the Marxist theorists' positions in terms of art, history and politics in Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian,' in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 3, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), pp. 260-302

<sup>81</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, p. 101

<sup>82</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband „Darmstadt-Dokumente“*, Vol. 1, No. 99, (Munich, Edition text+kritik, 1999); Gianmario Borio and Hermann Danuser (eds.), *Im Zenit der Moderne: Die Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt 1946-1966*, 4 Vols., (Freiburg im Breisgau, Rombach, 1997); I will discuss Adorno's presence in Darmstadt in more detail below, especially concerning the essays he presented, *The Ageing of the New Music* (1956 and *Vers une musique informelle* (1962). For a historical overview of the Darmstadt avant-

Important figures like Pierre Boulez, for example, sought to employ earlier Adornoian concepts in order to justify their own ideological position<sup>83</sup> and the creation of the Darmstadt ‘myth,’<sup>84</sup> yet ignored the more critical position that Adorno took subsequently in texts such as ‘The Ageing of New Music.’<sup>85</sup> Crucially, as Hellmut Federhofer points out, the question as to the meaning of the concepts themselves, including the work of art, received a ‘completely new answer’ through this exchange, and ‘unwittingly revalued the avant-garde and lifted it as a cultural-political factor into collective consciousness.’<sup>86</sup>

Adorno’s writings about the artwork<sup>87</sup> and his perception of its contemporary state of crisis are deeply rooted in broader philosophical concerns in his *oeuvre*.<sup>88</sup> His analysis of the dialectics of

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garde and its influence on the following generation of composers, see: Célestin Deliège, *Cinquante ans de modernité musicale: de Darmstadt à l'IRCAM. Contribution historiographique à une musicologie critique*, (Sprimont, Mardaga, 2003); Deliège mentions the notion of *musique informelle* in his work (p. 917-918), when he asks the question: ‘La question ici posée est bien de savoir s’il [Adorno] n’est pas erroné de mêler le formalisme à l’avant-garde?’ [The question here is to find out whether he [Adorno] was not mistaken to mix formalism with the avant-garde?]

<sup>83</sup> See Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, (Music in the Twentieth Century), (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010)

<sup>84</sup> Hermann Danuser, ‘“L’École de Darmstadt” et son mythe,’ in J.-J. Nattiez (ed.), *Musiques du XXe siècle*, (Arles, Actes Sud-Cité de la musique, 2003)

<sup>85</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Das Altern der neuen Musik,’ in *Der Monat* (May 1955); GS 14 (1973), pp. 143-167; translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, ‘The Ageing of the New Music,’ in *Telos*, Vol. 77 (Autumn 1988), pp. 95-116; also in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music. Theodor W. Adorno, op. cit.*, pp. 181-202

<sup>86</sup> Hellmut Federhofer, ‘Das negative Kunstwerk in der Musikphilosophie Adornos,’ in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (1990), pp. 247-248: ‘Der enorme Einfluss, den Adorno im persönlichen Verkehr mit zahlreichen Komponisten auf die Praxis ausübte, lässt eine solche Einschränkung kaum gerechtfertigt erscheinen. Denn mit Schönberg und Webern, an deren Schaffen die Avantgarde anknüpfte, gewann Adorno als kritische Instanz zugleich Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Neuen Musik während der Fünfziger- und Sechzigerjahre. Die Frage nach ihrem Sinn erfuhr durch ihn eine vollkommen neue Beantwortung, die zwar nicht Schönbergs Zustimmung fand, aber unversehens die Avantgarde ästhetisch aufwertete und als kulturpolitischen Faktor in das allgemeine Bewusstsein erhob.’

<sup>87</sup> See Ludwig Finscher, ‘Über den Kunstwerkbegriff bei Adorno,’ in Otto Kolleritsch (ed.), *Adorno und die Musik*, (Graz, Universal Edition, 1979), pp. 64-70

Enlightenment revealed the other side of rationalism—the tendency towards total rationalization, revealed in the barbarism of two world wars and industrialized mass killing. Importantly, he contended that the artwork could not escape this rationalization under the influence of increasing *technification* (to use a term coined by Eric Krakauer in his seminal work on Adorno's critique, *The Disposition of the Subject: Adorno's Dialectics of Technology*)<sup>89</sup> and the relentless quest to dominate nature—the central focus of Adorno's dialectics of subject and object. According to Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer,<sup>90</sup> the relation between subject and object is more important than the attempt to define *what* an object is.<sup>91</sup> Their critique of Enlightenment shows how nature has become objectified, building on Georg Lukács' concept of the reification of consciousness. As Krakauer explains, Adorno and Horkheimer introduce their own version of Lukács' concept of the reification of consciousness:

Consciousness, indeed thinking itself, defines and hypostatizes itself, imposes proper limits upon itself. It thereby sacrifices its motility or dynamism, its self-differentiation, its alteration through reflection upon itself. It makes itself into a determinate thing, object, or *res*, the proper limits of which can be policed and maintained. At the same time, and to the very extent, that consciousness reifies itself, it

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<sup>88</sup> See Martin Zenck, *Kunst als Begrifflose Erkenntnis. Zum Kunstbegriff der Ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos*, (Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der Schönen Künste, Texte und Abhandlungen), (Munich, W. Fink, 1977)

<sup>89</sup> Eric L. Krakauer, *The Disposition of the Subject: Reading Adorno's Dialectic of Technology*, (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1998)

<sup>90</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, (Amsterdam, Querido, 1947); GS 3 (1981); translated by John Cumming, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (New York, Herder & Herder, 1972); with regards to Horkheimer's part in the writing of this work, as well as his role in establishing the Frankfurt School, see: Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Zeugnisse. Theodor W. Adorno zum sechzigsten Geburtstag. Im Auftrag des Instituts für Sozialforschung*, (Frankfurt am Main, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963) and John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, (Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011)

<sup>91</sup> See Eric L. Krakauer, *op. cit.*, p. 23

also reifies the world, that of which it is conscious. The world is determined as a conglomeration of objects.<sup>92</sup>

For Krakauer, thinking can be understood as *technology*, ‘the poser/knowledge that generates and regenerates itself, [...] essentially *a mode of thinking or reasoning*.’<sup>93</sup> This is what Adorno and Horkheimer call ‘technological rationality’;<sup>94</sup> as such, thinking has become an ‘organ of domination.’<sup>95</sup> Thinking posits itself ‘as removed from nature and set up over against it,’<sup>96</sup> in ‘enlightened progress, a movement out of ensnarement in nature or myth.’<sup>97</sup> Thinking’s repression of itself as natural is its own reification, the natural itself ‘that stands before subjective thinking or the thinking subject, [...] the positing of the natural as objective has also posited it as dependent upon thinking’<sup>98</sup> as found in the work of Kant and Hegel. ‘Nature as object becomes regarded as a reflection of the preeminent thinking subject, as essentially subjective thinking.’<sup>99</sup> Objects are then nothing more than manipulatable and exploitable, ‘at the complete disposal of technological rationality, complete because nature-as-object is itself essentially rational and subjective.’<sup>100</sup> In cutting out anything outside itself, thinking as technological rationality sacrifices ‘the very task of thinking: a reaching beyond itself, a moving or stretching toward the other [or the non-identical with itself].’<sup>101</sup> Apart from Krakauer,<sup>102</sup> the Dutch philosopher Saskia Wendel

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>94</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (New York, Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 121

<sup>95</sup> Krakauer, *op. cit.*, p. 39

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Krakauer, *op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 24. Quoting Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (p. 39) ‘Perception [*Vorstellung*] is, to be sure, only an instrument. Human beings distance themselves in thought from nature in order to set it up before them in such a way as to dominate it’, Krakauer argues that ‘thinking distinguishes and distances itself from

points out that subjective thinking in this way has forgotten that it is also *object* in its physicality, in being sensory and empirical.<sup>103</sup> For Adorno, then,

the object stands against the subject. The result of this confrontation is a resolution of the object in an absolute identity which is represented by the subject. The subject is identified with thinking, and the object with non-thinking, with the other of thinking and of the mind, with the sensory, with matter, but also with temporariness, history, contingency.<sup>104</sup>

This is a crucial point, if we want to understand the importance of the object, even more so the (musical) artwork, as mediating this tension between object and subject, space and time. As we shall see, Benjamin contended that, as objects, artworks speak a silent language of their own, independent of our subjectivizing.

### **The work of art's content: social and historical mediations**

It is important to understand this conception of thinking in order to grasp how artworks function in a societal context. Rather than defining what an artwork *is* or *represents*, Adorno attempts to show this dynamic between art and society. In the opening pages of *Aesthetic Theory*, he writes that ‘nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.’<sup>105</sup> Against the freedom of modernist art, he posits that art is always limited to a particular, which ‘comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole. In it the place of art became uncertain.’<sup>106</sup> Adorno refers to the idea that, in the totally

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nature so as to escape the subjugation to nature and the vulnerability to nature's power, and instead to obtain power over nature. This very distancing is what Horkheimer/Adorno call enlightened progress, a movement out of ensnarement in nature or myth (both are the same).’ I will return to the reconceptualization of the concept of progress later.

<sup>103</sup> Saskia Wendel, ‘Adorno over de mogelijkheid van metafysica,’ in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, Vol. 66, No. 4, (2004), pp. 627-648

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.



administered world, art carved out a position of autonomy<sup>107</sup> (in opposition to heteronomous artforms)<sup>108</sup> from the social function it once had, in what he terms ‘the cultic function and its (after-)images [*Nachbilder*], through the idea of humanity.’<sup>109</sup> On the question whether art and artworks are still possible, Adorno writes that art may have severed its relation to its own preconditions, as this

question is kindled by art’s own past. Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity. Thus, however tragic they appear, artworks tend a priori toward affirmation.<sup>110</sup>

However, for Adorno art does not root itself in first principles; in this sense the concept of art is not to be gleaned from one set of rules, but

is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition. [...] The effort to subsume the historical genesis of art ontologically under an ultimate motif would necessarily flounder in such disparate material that the theory would emerge empty-handed except for the obviously relevant insight that the arts will not fit into any gapless concept of art.<sup>111</sup>

It is this historical understanding of the *becoming* of art, rather than a fixed *being* which underlies Adorno’s position; in such a way that he declares that the definition of art ‘is at every point indicated by what art once was, but it is legitimated only by what art became with regard to what

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<sup>107</sup> For a critique of Adorno’s understanding of art’s autonomy as well as Peter Bürger’s, see Lambert Zuidervaart, ‘The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger,’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), pp. 61-77

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*; Bürger’s central claim about Adorno is that he ‘misreads the autonomy of art and systematically neglects heteronomous art.’ (p. 61); see also Chapter 7 for Xenakis’s theorising of a new heteronomous music, *in praxis* relating to his composition of *Duel* (1959) for 2 orchestras and 2 conductors.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* See below for a further exploration of the idea of humanity and the multiple threats of rationalisation and political oppression.

<sup>110</sup> Saskia Wendel, *op. cit.*

<sup>111</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 2

it wants to, and perhaps can, become.’<sup>112</sup> This double movement consists of both a quantitative difference *vis-à-vis* the merely empirical and a qualitative adoption of this difference which renews the concept of art. In a seemingly anachronistic fashion, Adorno claims that ‘much that was not art – cultic works, for instance – has over the course of history metamorphosed into art; and much that was once art is that no longer.’<sup>113</sup> In other words, what is considered to be art at one point may lose this status, or vice versa; this is essentially a dialectical view of artworks as not simply historically determined, but gaining or losing the qualification as artworks from their inner constitution in relation to the society and historical moment in which they are considered aesthetically. In this regard, Adorno argues that Hegel was correct in considering art as historical and transitory, but that it did not occur to him that the substance of art (its ‘absoluteness’, in Hegel’s term)<sup>114</sup> was not identical or subsumed in art’s own life and possible death.<sup>115</sup> The particular way Adorno expresses this is in itself important, in that there is an implicit link with the work of Walter Benjamin: ‘What reactionary cultural pessimism once vociferated against cannot be suppressed by the critique of culture: that, as Hegel ruminated a hundred and fifty years ago, art may have entered the age of its demise.’<sup>116</sup> As the scholar and translator of Adorno’s work Robert Hullot-Kentor argues, this may certainly refer to Benjamin’s essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction*, ‘a title on which Adorno works repeated

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>114</sup> See Valentina Ricci, ‘The Role of *Erinnerung* in Absolute Knowing: History and Absoluteness,’ in Valentina Ricci and Federico Sanguinetti (eds.), *Hegel on Recollection: Essays on the Concept of Erinnerung in Hegel’s System*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-20; F. Chiereghin, ‘Absoluteness and Temporality in Hegel’s concept of History, in *Verifiche: Rivista Trimestriale di Scienze Umane*, Vol. 27, No. 3-4 (1998)

<sup>115</sup> Adorno further develops his critique of Hegel’s theory of time, which he sees a ‘simple dichotomy between the temporary and the everlasting’ and its relation to the primacy of the general in his philosophy of history. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, *op. cit.*, p. 321

<sup>116</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 3

variations, often in ways that cannot be matched with adequate compactness in translation.<sup>117</sup>

One of those other references can be noted in the previous paragraph, where Adorno explicitly refers to a passage of the same essay by Benjamin:

Posed from on high, the question whether something such as film is or is no longer art leads nowhere. Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain. The tension between what motivates art and art's past circumscribes the so-called questions of aesthetic constitution. Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants.<sup>118</sup>

Walter Benjamin's writings refer to these new media, particularly the way in which they allow for the reproduction of works of art; he argued that around 1900,

technological reproduction not only had reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art, profoundly modifying their effect, but it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes. In gauging this standard, we would do well to study the impact which its two different manifestations – the reproduction of artworks and the art of film – are having on art in its traditional form.<sup>119</sup>

The one thing lacking in even the most perfect reproduction, according to Benjamin, is the

here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence – and nothing else – that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership. [...] what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition. One might focus these aspects of the artwork in the concept of the aura, and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproduction of the work of art is the latter's aura.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 368

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>119</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, p. 102

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 103

Returning to the idea that art's substance lies in its transitoriness, Adorno argued that the revolt of art against the teleological attitude towards the objectivity of the historical world, became a revolt against art itself. Importantly, Adorno distinguishes between the substance of art and art's own historical trajectory, a distinction of critical importance for an understanding of the work of art in this thesis. As we will see, the question whether artworks can exist at all in the twentieth century, and which *form* such works would adopt, is the central question of this thesis, in light of the work of the modernist composers I consider here. Furthermore, 'whether art is abolished, perishes, or despairingly hangs on, it is not mandated that the content [*Gehalt*]<sup>121</sup> of past art perish. It [art's content] could survive art in a society that had freed itself of the barbarism of its culture.'<sup>122</sup> The concept of *content*, as Adorno scholars acknowledge, is central to his aesthetics.<sup>123</sup> As an English term it is used as a translation of two distinct German words: *Inhalt* and *Gehalt*, which – as Robert Hullot-Kentor explains in his translation of *Aesthetic Theory* – 'in aesthetic

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<sup>121</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>123</sup> See for example Zuidervaart's argument in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, The Redemption of Illusion*, (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991), p. 122-124. He explains that there are two dialectics of note: 'One is a dialectic between discursive and nondiscursive knowledge. The other is a dialectic between mimesis and rationality within art as a mode of discursive knowledge.' (p. 122) It is the second dialectic which is relevant here: 'a tension between mimetic expression and rational construction or, in traditional terms, between content [*Inhalt*] and form [*Form*]' (p. 124) Zuidervaart argues that *Inhalt* 'can be approached from two independent sides, as either an artistic sublimation of objectified impulses or an artistic transmutation of objectified elements and relations in their non-identity [...] 'Content' [*Inhalt*] comes to stand for mimetic non-identity within works of art.' (p. 124) The other term – *form* – is 'important for Adorno because it is a way in which artworks both oppose society and communicate with it.' (p. 123) *Gehalt* is understood by Zuidervaart as 'import' and is not simply musical but also social (p. 123). *Gehalt*, then, refers to the dialectic of form and content, and is to be understood as a dynamic concept, not a static, formalist one: 'Unless one traces the contours of content [*Inhalt*], form [*Form*], and their dialectic [*Gehalt*], one misses the way in which social tensions "shape" the artwork itself.' (p. 123). See also James Buhler, 'Book Review,' in *Indiana Theory Review*, Vol. 15, No. 11, (Spring 1994), pp. 139-163, more specifically pp. 148-150

contexts, serve to distinguish the idea of thematic content or subject matter from that of content in the sense of import, essence, or substance of a work.<sup>124</sup>

As far as the modernist musical artwork in particular is concerned, Adorno addressed the relationship between its content and its place in history explicitly in an important essay, ‘The Relationship between Philosophy and Music,’<sup>125</sup> in which he argues that to consider music as temporal at its core – a universal quality that on which all philosophers can agree – is ultimately another illusory conceptualization. This is how he introduces the problem:

[The] consideration of the contemporary relation of philosophy and music leads to the insight that the timeless essence of music must be viewed as a chimera. Only history itself, real history with all its suffering and all its contradiction, constitutes the truth of music. This, however, means nothing else than that one cannot acquire a philosophical knowledge of music by constructing its ontological origin, but only from the standpoint of the present.<sup>126</sup>

This passage highlights Adorno’s insistence on the importance of cognition [*Erkenntnis*]<sup>127</sup> (or as he momentarily calls it the ‘penetrating knowledge’ of music) which results from considering the fleeting experience of music and the attempt to translate it into knowledge. This principle of

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 368. Hullot Kentor continues his explanation by indicating that the meaning of these words is far from absolute: ‘The distinction, however, is not terminologically fixed in German or in Adorno’s writings. One concept may well be used in place of the other. In some sections of *Aesthetic Theory*, it is relatively easy to recognize which concept is at stake, as for instance in the lengthy development of the relation of form and content, where content is obviously ‘Inhalt.’ In these passages, the German is given when the concept is first introduced. At other points in the text, however, differentiation becomes more difficult.’ Hullot-Kentor also admits that at one point he had to resort to translating ‘Gehalt’ as ‘substance’; however, the German ‘Substanz’ is normally translated as ‘substance.’

<sup>125</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei. Die Kunst und die Künste.’ *Anmerkungen zur Zeit*, Vol. 12, (Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1967); translation in Theodor W. Adorno, ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,’ translated by Susan Gillespie, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 66-79

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> The translation of the German ‘Erkenntnis’ can be both ‘cognition’ or ‘knowledge,’ depending on the context.

reading an artwork in its particularity is the result of the contemplation of the work, not simply empirically or purely philosophically, but through a dialectical process to which we will return in subsequent chapters.

### Vers une musique informelle: towards a theory of post-serial musical form

The central focus of the next section of this chapter is Adorno's concept of *musique informelle*, especially as it informs the notion of a music which could potentially liberate itself from the constraints of formal models traditionally seen as fundamental to the unfolding of *musical time*. The importance of this concept is often interpreted as forward-looking – presenting a 'horizon' as Adorno writes – opening new perspectives to composers and philosophers. The reception of the concept – though diverse and not universally acknowledged – can nonetheless be seen in the composition of new works, and in the implications it could have for theorizations of this contemporary oeuvre, regardless of explicit references to Adorno's concept. A number of authors have analyzed the conception of *musique informelle* from a historical and musical point of view, including Martin Zenck.<sup>128</sup> However, the most important systematic work building on this concept, radically expanding it, both in itself and as constitutive of an *aesthetic* of the *informel*, is Gianmario Borio's book *Die musikalische Avantgarde um 1960*.<sup>129</sup> Other works elaborating Adorno's concept of the *informel* include Michel Ratté's book *L'expressivité de l'oubli*<sup>130</sup> and Nels J. Rogers' thesis *Theodor W. Adorno's Poetics of Dissonance*.<sup>131</sup> Their respective methodological approaches can be described as music-historical, music-philosophical and literary-critical. Ratté's book also develops a theory of forgetfulness which builds on elements from *Vers une musique informelle*, while at the same time exploring concepts from Bergson's *The Creative Evolution*, in

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<sup>128</sup> Martin Zenck, 'Auswirkungen einer "musique informelle" auf die neue Musik: zu Theodor W. Adornos Formvorstellung,' in *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (1979), pp. 137-165

<sup>129</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993). While Borio's work features in this chapter, his text will also be confronted with other approaches to Adorno's writings.

<sup>130</sup> Michel Ratté, *L'expressivité de l'oubli – Essai sur le sentiment et la forme dans la musique de la modernité*, (Brussels, La lettre volée, 1999), p. 18

<sup>131</sup> Nels Rogers, *Theodor W. Adorno's Poetics of Dissonance: Music, Language and Literary Modernism*, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2001), p. 327

which he argued that the experience of time as *duration* can be better understood based on the idea of creative intuition rather than rational intellect.<sup>132</sup> Adorno used Bergson's conception of time, especially in his critique of the music of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky, as evidenced in the *Philosophy of New Music*.<sup>133</sup>

### **Adorno and the musical avant-garde in Darmstadt**

Prior to his return to Darmstadt in 1961, Adorno had formulated a general critique of integral serialism as a totalizing system, which he regarded as pseudo-objective and overdetermined in its compositional technique, especially as presented in his essay 'The Ageing of the New Music' (1955).<sup>134</sup> However, subsequent essays reflect a more forward-looking stance towards a music aesthetic liberated from traditional forms, genres and tonality, as well as dodecaphonic and integral serial techniques. The most prominent articulation of this appeared in *Vers une musique informelle* (1961).<sup>135</sup> This article coincided with Adorno's return to the Darmstadt summer course in 1961 after a four-year absence. In music-historical terms, four aspects of the essay can be distinguished: the changes to the musical work of art Adorno observed; the essay's presentation in the Darmstadt *Ferienkurse*; the research Adorno did in support of the central claim; and its open, forward-looking character.

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<sup>132</sup> Henri Bergson, Arnaud François, and Frédéric Worms, *L'évolution créatrice*, (Quadrige. Grands Textes, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2007); translation as Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell, (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1911)

<sup>133</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, GS 12, p. 176; Adorno argues that Stravinsky has finished off musical Bergsonism. 'Stravinsky und seine Schule bereiten dem musikalischen Bergsonianismus sein Ende. Sie spielen den *temps espace* gegen den *temps durée* aus.'

<sup>134</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Ageing of the New Music', in Adorno, T.W. and R. Leppert, *Essays on music: Theodor W. Adorno*. 2002, Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press), pp. 181-202

<sup>135</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', in *Darmstädter Beiträge* (1961); republished and revised in *Quasi una Fantasia* (1963); GS 16 (1978), pp. 493-540; Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia: essays on modern music*, (London; New York: Verso, 1992)



Firstly, as Nels Rogers points out, developments had occurred in the intervening period which for Adorno, at least, signaled that new music was again becoming a critical art form and not merely sound patterns [*Klangtapeten*]<sup>136</sup> affirmative of the status quo. Adorno tended to see these developments as part of a general critique of the anti-subjectivism of integral serialism.<sup>137</sup>

Secondly, the presentation of the thesis in Darmstadt was held as a manifesto-like conference, in homage to ‘the country, in which the tradition of the avant-garde is at one with the civil courage to [produce] the manifesto’ and gave it a French title: *Vers une musique informelle*. The long text, which Adorno presented in two seminars, links up with several elements from an earlier critique,<sup>138</sup> although it contains at the same time a more positive position towards the avant-garde composers and traits of a utopian perspective of music, expounded theoretically through the concept of the *informel*.<sup>139</sup>

Thirdly, according to Gianmario Borio, this new attitude developed in response to Heinz-Klaus Metzger’s hostile critique of “The Ageing of the New Music” in his article ‘Abortive Concepts in

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<sup>136</sup> The translation of *Klangtapete* as ‘sound pattern’ is not correct, but should read ‘musical wallpaper’, often used in connection with the music of Eric Satie, who created his famous ‘musique d’ameublement’ – music to furnish a room with. This distinction is important, as the idea of the sound pattern is highly relevant to the music of both John Cage and Morton Feldman, who specifically engaged with the idea of changing patterns – often without the usual developmental techniques seen as essential to the compositional technique.

<sup>137</sup> Nels Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 273; for a discussion of the serialist work of art and the crisis of the work concept, see below.

<sup>138</sup> Cfr. ‘The Ageing of the New Music,’ a presentation Adorno gave in April 1954 for the Süddeutsche Rundfunk. ‘Das Altern der neuen Musik,’ in *Der Monat* (May 1955); GS 14 (1973), pp.143-167; translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, ‘The Ageing of the New Music,’ in *Telos*, Vol. 77 (Autumn 1988), pp. 95-116; also in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music. Theodor W. Adorno*, pp.181-202

<sup>139</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993), p. 102

the 'Theory and Criticism of Music', which appeared in *Die Reihe* in 1961,<sup>140</sup> and in which he outlined his own concept of an 'a-serial' music.<sup>141</sup> Metzger's essay prompted Adorno to study

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<sup>140</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, 'Abortive Concepts in the Theory and Criticism of Music,' in *Die Reihe*, Nr. 5, 1961, pp. 21-29

<sup>141</sup> A-serialism has been identified with the concept of *musique informelle* – amongst others by Edward Campbell, who writes: 'In "Difficulties" (1964), Adorno reconsiders some of the issues previously tackled in 'The Ageing' and in *Vers une musique informelle*. While Boulez and Stockhausen were still committed to serialism, he retained his misgivings about the 'total determination', 'progressive rationalisation' and 'reification' which he believed were implicit to it and on this basis he reasserts that the ageing of new music was taking place, and that 'the best' of his Darmstadt colleagues, who were unhappy with this view in 1954, now seemed to be mostly in agreement with it. ... Boulez is, presumably, counted among their number. ... Boulez in his Darmstadt lectures reprises the criticisms of serial practice, which he first formulated in 'Current Investigations'. While *musique informelle* or **a-serialism** [my stress] remains the goal towards which new music should be working, [Adorno] is as unable as before to define it with any degree of precision other than to say that it could serve to relate the wealth of integral serialist detail to the composed whole.' Campbell thus would appear to equate *musique informelle* with Metzger's notion of an a-serial music. This projection of an uncritical dialectics (as opposed to Adorno's negative dialectics) onto this concept, which Adorno precisely tried to avoid, is not useful; to say the least, it paints these theorisations in dualistic terms rather than dialectical ones, let alone that they can be 'sublated' at all, especially in light of Adorno's critique of transcendental, universal concepts. As will be argued later in this thesis, the ahistorical aspect of this Hegelian synthesis and the pretence of a 'redemption-within-reach' are themselves further illusory conceptualisations. In the same way, atonality is a negation of tonal procedures, however, it remains in thrall to the tonal language through this negation. Aserialism in this sense is still related to serialism and does not escape its grasp, even negatively. As Erik Ulman has shown, Sylvano Bussotti *Due voci* of 1958 furnishes an example of an a-serial compositional language. See Erik Ulman, 'The Music of Sylvano Bussotti,' in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), pp. 186-201: 'Bussotti experimented with "integral" serial procedure, but his self-proclaimed "extroverted and egocentric character" remained irreconcilable with its impersonal rigor. In fact, he had no sooner encountered the new serialism than, in the 1958 *Due voci*, scored for the unusual combination of soprano, *ondes Martenot*, and orchestra, he left it behind, proclaiming his music 'aserial' as Webern, Schönberg, and Berg had been 'atonal.' Building on Metzger's (and Adorno's) dialectical conception of atonality, in which, as Metzger writes, "The privative "a" marks the negation of tonality, and the way this negation constantly refers atonal music back to tonality,' Bussotti established what he saw 'as a dialectical relationship with serial music. Although *Due voci*'s complex textures, angular and unpredictable gestures, and prevailing dissonance all owe a great deal to the sonic world of post-war serialism, Bussotti rejected the rational and detached methodology which underlay his models. In his prefatory note to the score, Bussotti describes aserialism as the "dialectical rebellion of the humanistic attitude in the man who writes music, against the stiff aridity of systems," a rebellion defined by its radical and improvisatory subjectivity: "For the first time in his life the composer disposes with memoranda, sketches, and the usual preliminary studies, and writes [almost

intensively works such as Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* and *Third Piano Sonata*, Stockhausen's *Klavierstück I*, *Zeitmaße* and *Gruppen*, and Cage's *Piano Concert*.<sup>142</sup> As Borio notes, it could not have escaped Adorno as an attentive observer around 1960 that the new tendencies in evidence in such works necessitated a reconceptualization of his music aesthetics—especially in their increasing deviation from the original aims of serial thought.<sup>143</sup> In *Klavierstück I*,<sup>144</sup> for example, Stockhausen uses serial 'group' technique, structuring groups of pitches according to an external ordering principle; and although these principles regulate quantitative relations between the groups (such as the degree of density and velocity), they do not, however, constitute qualitative relations between the intervals as in punctual serial technique. The intervals, which still had specific expressive characteristics for Webern, lose these qualities because of the structural merging of the spatial and temporal dimensions in the series (time as a function of space, essentially). Most importantly, the ordering principles remain anonymous, because they do not

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every page] directly onto the transparencies (which are then used to reproduce the manuscript).” In other words, *Due voci* infuses the gestural and sonic world of the serial avant-garde with the intimacy and subjectivity which serialism had sought through impersonal rationality to avoid. It represents the beginning of Bussotti's attempt to reconcile the anachronistic humanism of his early works with a new, experimental style.’ (p. 188)

<sup>142</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 102: ‘Diese Neueinstellung erklärt sich hauptsächlich als Folge der Replik Metzgers auf Adornos Aufsatz *Das Altern der neuen Musik*, die sich Ende der fünfziger Jahre in einer intensiveren Beschäftigung mit Werken wie *Le marteau sans maître* und der dritten Klaviersonate von Boulez, *Zeitmasse* und *Gruppen* von Stockhausen sowie dem Klavierkonzert von Cage konkretisiert.’

<sup>143</sup> Walter Gieseler shows in his *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert* that, over the course of less than a decade, Stockhausen's (and other serial composers') serial technique made remarkable steps: from integral serial (punctual) technique, via group composition (with small groups of pitches, rhythms etc. given a semi-serial treatment), to so-called field composition (*voices* as such disappear even more than in group-composition as the statistical organization of mass structures of approximate determination substitutes individually determined tones). The group technique is apparent in the eponymous work *Gruppen* (1955-57) for three orchestras. Stockhausen's *Zeitmaße* (1955/56) is an example of field technique, which interestingly stretches its into the domain of time as *time-fields* [*Zeitfelder*]. Field-composition in his view seems to include non-serial works and techniques such as used by Iannis Xenakis' stochastic technique as used in *Metastaseis* and *Pithoprakta*. I shall return to the latter's compositional praxis later in this thesis. See Walter Gieseler, *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert : Details, Zusammenhänge*. (Celle, Moeck, 1975) pp. 81-95

<sup>144</sup> See Figure 1 below

manifest themselves immanently from within the composition. Adorno may have regarded such scores as an indirect answer to his critique and at the same time as a challenge to renewed reflection. *Philosophy of Modern Music* – with its innovative concepts of musical material, compositional subject, the language character of music, and the spatialization of musical time – greatly influenced composers and critics, and the increasing signs of a positive response to his ideas prompted his return to Darmstadt.

Fourthly, Adorno sensitively observed the appearance of a new phase of the musical avant-garde, when composers gradually became more conscious of the fact that while it was possible to account for a number of parameters of music, it seemed increasingly less desirable to do so. As Nels Rogers observes, ‘something was always left up to chance, particularly with regard to the temporal dimension of music.’<sup>145</sup> Developments of this nature seemed to signal the possibility of escaping the impasse of total rationalization of the musical material which Adorno saw as the principal problematic feature of integral serialist composition. It is in this theoretical context that Adorno’s interest in musical time can be understood, namely as a consideration of time from a perspective which is neither simply mathematical nor a philosophical critique of new music.

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<sup>145</sup> Nels Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 274

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# Nr. 2 KLAVIERSTÜCKE

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## I

KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN

<sup>\*)</sup> Das Tempo jedes Stückes wird vom kleinsten zu spielenden Zeitwert bestimmt: So schnell, wie möglich. Wenn dieses Tempo ermittelt und metronomisch fixiert ist, können alle komplizierteren Zeitproportionen in Klammern (-----) durch Tempo-wechsel ersetzt werden.

The tempo of each piece, determined by the smallest note-value, is "As fast as possible." When the player has found this tempo and determined it metronomically, all the more complicated time-proportions under the brackets (-----) can be replaced by changes of tempo.

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Figure 1: Karlheinz Stockhausen, Klavierstück I, p. 1

### *Musique informelle* and free atonality

In a different interpretation of the central tenet of the essay, Martin Zenck, however, claims that Adorno took the position of an ‘adviser without advice’ [*ratloser Ratgeber*], stating that Adorno reaches back to the period of Schoenberg’s free atonal compositions (especially *Klavierstück No. 3* from op. 11 and *Erwartung* op. 17,<sup>146</sup> which are at the centre of the ideal-type of *musique informelle*),<sup>147</sup> while criticizing serial music as if it were dodecaphonic. Syntactically, the situation for the serial composer was radically different, in that the language-like character of music had been altered, so that ‘for the listener Gestalt and structure had become inextricably linked.’<sup>148</sup> From the temporal perspective *Erwartung* is rather significant, as it aims to ‘represent in slow motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour.’<sup>149</sup> Another crucial influence on Adorno’s conceptualization of

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<sup>146</sup> In the musical example taken from the vocal score of *Erwartung*, op. 17, a passage was chosen to highlight the atonal language, the tempo changes and the material’s strong inter-relatedness: the melody to the words ‘Und drei **Tage warst du** nicht bei mir... keine Zeit... so oft hast du keine Zeit gehabt in diesen letzten Monaten’ [bar 285] is repeated and varied on the next page in the music to the words [In blitzartiger Erinnerung] ‘Ah, jetzt erinnere ich mich **der Seufzer im Halbschlaf** wie ein Name.’ It is no coincidence that Adorno not only showed a great interest in the music itself, but in the text’s reference to aspects of memory, time (and the lack thereof), dreams, and the Name. At this point in the thesis, I simply want to draw the attention to these details in order to better understand the general line of inquiry into music as an art in time, with a strong (virtual) spatial aspect. One could also read this passage in Benjaminian terms: the textual aspect mentioned above and the indication ‘in blitzartiger Erinnerung’ reveal an uncanny aspect of the psychological state of the character in *Erwartung* which flits and moves between different moments. The connections between the different elements of the text have an underlying musical connection, which supports the sense of unity, however, not in a traditional sense of unity of drama, but more akin to the structure of dreams. Cf. Chapter 4 in this thesis.

<sup>147</sup> It is clear that Adorno did not actually think that a return to free atonality was historically possible. Zenck explains this by referring to the syntactic difference of atonal composition and the post-war state of musical composition; in particular, atonal composition still referred to tonal musical gestures in its avoidance of traditional harmonic progressions, consonant intervals, etc). Cfr. Martin Zenck, *op. cit.*, p. 147

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

*musique informelle*, was paradoxically not a musical one, but the so-called *art informel*, a term coined by the Frenchman Michel Tapié in his work *Un art autre*.<sup>150</sup>

**wieder rascher**  $\text{♩} = 60$   
(immer klarer werdend) **285**

und plötzlich bezwangst du dich... Und drei Ta - ge warst du nicht bei mir...

kei-ne Zeit... so oft hast du kei-ne Zeit ge-habt in die-sen letz-ten Mo-na-ten...

**steigernd**

U. E. 5362

Figure 2: Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung* Op. 17 (1909-1927), p. 32

**295** (In blitzartiger Erinnerung) **etwas zurückhaltend**

das ist doch... Ah... jetzt er - in - ne - re ich mich... der Seuf-

zer im Halb-schlaf... wie ein Na - me... Du hast mir die Fra - ge von den Lip-pen geküßt

**langsam**  $\text{♩} = 80$

U. E. 5362.

Figure 3: *Erwartung* p. 33

<sup>150</sup> Michel Tapié, *Un Art Autre, où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du reel*, (Paris, Gabriel-Giraud, 1952); translated as 'An Other Art. Observations of Michel Tapié,' in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2012), pp. 43-44

However, in reconnecting with the avant-garde, Gianmario Borio suggests Adorno had other motives as well.<sup>151</sup> At the theoretical level, there are the consequences of a postulate Adorno formulated only later: the apparent relationships of the ‘unconscious writing of history’<sup>152</sup> carried out by works of art, which otherwise remain inaccessible, through empirical observations or purely philosophical considerations. It is in this sense, that the concept of the dialectical image attempts to explode the seemingly static artwork, in confronting it with the listener or viewer. Art (particularly music) constituted a particularly well-suited cultural locus in which recognition of overlapping social tendencies could be discovered.<sup>153</sup> This philosophical position, however, necessitates a continuous analysis of new compositional techniques. As Borio notes, it could not have escaped Adorno as an attentive observer around 1960, that in the swift musical development new perspectives had opened up and that they demanded a reconceptualization of his music aesthetics.

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<sup>151</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 102

<sup>152</sup> See also Peter Bürger; he, too, argues that art can be seen as unconscious historiography, with two possible solutions as to the question of the mediation of art and society: firstly, one can ask the question of those social instances through which, on the one hand, society works itself into the work of art, and, on the other hand, how the work interacts with society. Strangely, Bürger claims that Adorno and Lukács did not pursue this, because of the Hegelian concept of mediation they follow, which states that mediation is not a middle between two different opposites, but the process itself of the dialectical transition of the one into the other. This means that mediation between art and society cannot be found in a third, social instance, but lays in the work of art itself. The society of a certain time enters the form of the work of art when the artist devotes himself to engaging with musical material – which is the result of a historical process that incorporates layered, historical experience. See Peter Bürger, *Das Vermittlungsproblem*, *op. cit.*

<sup>153</sup> In a discussion about the genesis and contents of the *Philosophy of New Music*, which Adorno and Rudolf Stephan had in 1960 in the studio of the Süddeutsche Rundfunk in Stuttgart, Adorno underlined the meaning of music for his philosophical concepts; he stated that ‘many experiences, which I then tried to hold on to philosophically, were originally made in the aesthetic realm, before all in compositions’.



The second reason, according to Borio,<sup>154</sup> is to be found in the change of the aesthetics of composition itself. The increasing diversion from the original goals of serial thought, as shown in the compositions of Boulez and Stockhausen,<sup>155</sup> could have been regarded by Adorno as an indirect answer to his critique and at the same time as a challenge, to engage in renewed reflection. The reception of the *Philosophy of Modern Music* – as I have indicated before, with its concepts of material, compositional subject, language character and spatialization (of time) – became more apparent on the part of the composers and critics and prompted the return of Adorno to Darmstadt.<sup>156</sup> As I have argued, Adorno noted a new phase in the musical avant-garde, as composers increasingly found dissatisfaction in the total control of all parameters of music, with pitch as primordial. In this regard, Nels Rogers observes prosaically that although this control seemed exhaustive, ‘something was always left up to chance, particularly with regard to the temporal dimension of music.’<sup>157</sup> Morton Feldman was the first to introduce a graphic notation, in an attempt to grasp the (limited) degree of freedom for the performer in choosing both the timing and the precise harmonic content of chords, whilst specifying the register with more precision.<sup>158</sup> Feldman devised a system in which squares and rectangles distributed over three registers (high, middle and low) relate to pressing down a number of high, middle and low keys on the keyboard (in *Projection 3*), whilst exact pitches remain free to the player. However, he

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<sup>154</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 102

<sup>155</sup> As Walter Gieseler shows in his *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert*, over the course of less than a decade, Stockhausen’s serial technique made remarkable steps: from integral serial (punctual) technique, via so-called field composition (with small groups of pitches, rhythms etc. given a semi-serial treatment), to group composition. The last coincides obviously with the eponymous work *Gruppen* (1955-57) for three orchestras. See Gieseler, W., *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert : Details, Zusammenhänge*, (Celle, Moeck 1975), pp. 81-95

<sup>156</sup> Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, translated by Michael Robertson (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1995), pp. 512-517

<sup>157</sup> Nels Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 274

<sup>158</sup> The influence of Feldman’s *Projections* series on John Cage own compositional technique has been documented, cf. Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*, p. 45-48

also specifies the number of keys to be pressed down. The title *Projections* refers to Feldman's attempt not to compose, but to project sounds in space and time.<sup>159</sup>

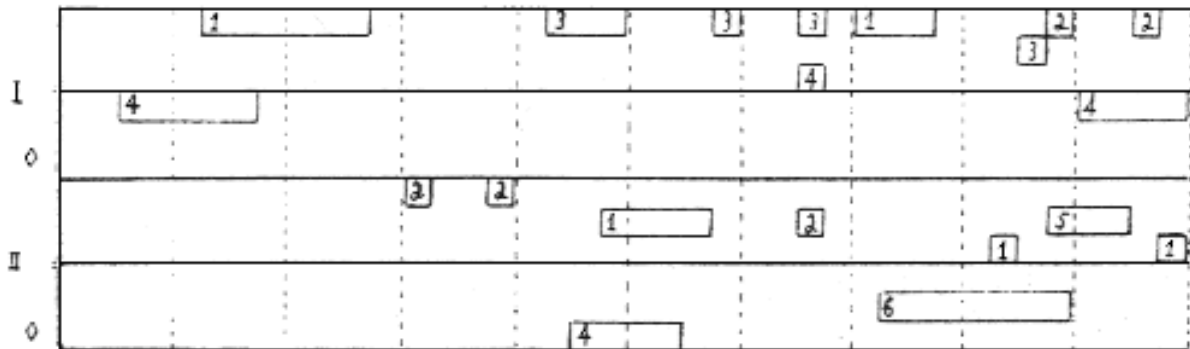


Figure 4: Morton Feldman, *Projection 3 for 2 pianos* (1950), p. 1

It is not the projection of sound or its simulation which is central to the conception of this piece, but the propagation of sound in the room, which Feldman believed can be achieved when the compositional rhetoric (as reified) in conventional notation is avoided. It is rather striking how Feldman's original idea – inspired by Varèse, but resulting in a new notational system – fed back into Varèse's own practice, three years later, when he composed *Déserts* (1953). Varèse was highly interested in notating amplitudes; it is understood that he substituted Feldman's instrumental registers for dynamics.

The influence, however, of John Cage's music – especially his *Music of Changes*, based on chance operations (as gleaned from the *I ching*) – was later theorized by Pierre Boulez in his lecture on 'Alea'(dice)<sup>160</sup> in 1957.<sup>161</sup> As the musicologist Edward Campbell argues, Boulez also attempted –

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 45

<sup>160</sup> Pierre Boulez, 'Alea,' translated by David Noakes and Paul Jacobs, *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn/Winter, 1964), pp. 42-53. In this article, Boulez criticizes both pure chance music and, without irony, integral serialism.

<sup>161</sup> Peter Griffith, *John Cage*, (Oxford, OUP, 1981)

to a varying degree of success – to adopt some of the insights he gleaned from Adorno’s concept of *musique informelle* into his own compositional philosophy.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> See for example, Pierre Boulez, ‘L’informulé,’ in *Revue d’esthétique*, Vol. 8 (1985), pp. 25-29; and the short article ‘T.W. Adorno,’ in Jean-Jacques Nattiez (ed.), *Orientations: Collected Writings by Pierre Boulez*, translated by Martin Cooper, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 517-518

### Michel Tapié's *art informel*

The origins of *musique informelle* can be found in the *art informel*, a notion termed by the French curator Michel Tapié. He wrote in *Un art autre - An Unknown Art* (1952)

Everything has been called into question once more since that cascade of revolution going from Impressionism to Dada and Surrealism: we are beginning to realize what that means, and at which point this total review has caused the epoch in which we live to be especially thrilling. After centuries, if not a millennium, during which conditions evolved so slowly that in the normal rhythm of life, chance could not be perceived, and in which artistic problems (even ethic-aesthetic ones) were safe, [...] an entire system of certainty has collapsed.<sup>163</sup>

Tapié describes a three-stage movement of progressive becoming, one where the 'ossified' past 'order' is shown to be false, leading via an 'intoxicating anarchy' to a new order, or as he calls it, a 'new system of ideas about the range of our potential becoming.'<sup>164</sup> He places the search for the unknown future of this potential becoming in opposition to the academy, which in his eyes has died.

It is, after all, shocking to know that one is going to the unknown (it must always be like this for the creators, but it has never been so explicitly evident), and at this point we still find St. John of the Cross to give us the most pertinent advice: "In order to go to a place where you have not been, you must take an unfamiliar route." The academy has died, has it not?<sup>165</sup>

Tapié points to a different conception of art, one which he leaves open for new non-systematic developments in the artists' techniques; these differed to the point that they can be described negatively – as opposed to *thematic* works:

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<sup>163</sup> Michel Tapié, 'An Other Art. Observations of Michel Tapié,' in Kristine Stiles, and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2012), p. 44

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

The problems do not consist of replacing a figurative theme with an absence of theme, which is called abstract, non-figurative or non-objective, but really to create a work, with or without a theme, in front of which – be it aggressiveness, banality or sheer physical contact – one perceives gradually that one's customary hold on the situation has been lost. One is [...] called to enter [into either] ecstasy or madness for one's traditional criteria, one after the other, have been abandoned.<sup>166</sup>

Tapié explains that this loss of certainty includes a new sense of adventure, as something unknown both in terms of what will come next and

where it will be the spectator who is left to move to the next station which may be of infinitesimal or astounding violence[...] This tendency of almost utopian yearning attempted, however, to bring together the diverse artists of this non-movement. In many ways, what is apparent is the lack of a common style or –ism. Onto this canvas of conceptual confusion he projects a minimal project of an anti-systematic nature. Behind the multitude of approaches, however, one artist in particular referred to here was the Belgian-French poet, writer and painter Henri Michaux.<sup>167 168</sup>

It is his biographer Nina Parish who explains that the violence is crucial in the work of Henri Michaux,<sup>169</sup> whilst Tapié functioned as the 'unofficial spokesman for this disparate group,'<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Henri Michaux (1899-1984); see Marguerite Hui Müller-Yao, *Der Einfluß der Kunst der chinesischen Kalligraphie auf die westliche informelle Malerei*, (Ph.D. Thesis Bonn, Cologne, 1985); Müller-Yao, Marguerite, 'Informelle Malerei und chinesische Kalligrafie,' in Heinz Althöfer, *Informel, Begegnung und Wandel*, (Schriftenreihe des Museums am Ostwall, Vol. 2), (Dortmund, 2002); Rolf Wedewer, *Die Malerei des Informel. Weltverlust und Ich-Behauptung*, (Munich, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007)

<sup>169</sup> Nina Parish, *Henri Michaux: experimentation with signs*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007), p. 54

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

which apart from Michaux included Jean Dubuffet. Apart from his writings,<sup>171</sup> Tapié organized exhibitions.<sup>172</sup> It was his aim

to formulate a common denominator that might link the artists of post-war Paris who were experimenting with art as a starting-afresh, actively flouting all formal aesthetic conventions and instead placing the accent on fluidity, matter and gesture. These artists were opposed to traditional formalism and to the various en vogue forms of geometrical abstraction that had been introduced by the Cubists, continued by the Russian Constructivists, and encouraged by the Bauhaus movement after the Second World War.<sup>173</sup>

The central focus of this art was the focus on the material, as Parish writes:

Informal art instead appeared to highlight the precedence of matter over form. The exponents of *art informel* shared the opinion that painting should also be concerned with recording the actions of the artist in the process of painting, in which respect they have an affinity with the American school of Abstract Expressionism. An indirect, intuitive awareness of mental states and external phenomena would be communicated through this experimentation with matter and gesture.<sup>174</sup>

Parish explains how the exhibition in December 1952 formed the artistic counterpart to the publication of Tapié's manifesto, *Un Art autre: où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel*.<sup>175</sup> It functioned as an amalgam of the two exhibition titles mentioned above, written by Tapié, in which Michaux was cited as a precursor of the art informel tendency alongside Fautrier, Wols, Dubuffet, Georges Mathieu, Jackson Pollock and Alfonso Ossorio.<sup>176</sup> Interestingly, another artist

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 55: 'Tapié wrote several articles and prefaces to catalogues on Michaux, for example, 'Au Pays d'Henri Michaux' for an individual exhibition at the Galerie René Drouin in 1948.'

<sup>172</sup> Nina Parish, *op. cit.*, p. 55: 'In particular, 'Peintures non abstraites: où il s'agit d'un nouveau dévidage du réel' ['Non-abstract painting, or a new unwinding of the real'] in June 1952 at the Studio Paul Fachetti, and 'Un art autre' at the same gallery in December of the same year.'

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Michel Tapié, *Un Art Autre, où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel*, (Paris, Gabriel-Giraud, 1952)

<sup>176</sup> Parish, *op. cit.*, p. 55

who exhibited in May 1957 with Michaux and Dubuffet, was the German artist Wols,<sup>177</sup> a name referred to by Adorno in his *Vers une musique informelle*.<sup>178</sup> *Art autre* was far from constituting an established group or school of artists. This label was instead suggested by Tapié to classify a number of highly individual artists who had no desire to participate in an organized group. Indeed, he emphasizes the importance of individuality throughout *Un Art autre* and even states that the artists included were not working together with a collective aim:

I provisionally indicated this adventure as *Significance of the Informel*: [the following artists] brilliantly participate in it by the spirit of their researches (but without any thought of a collective project), and [which is] so much the better for it, in every sense: Tobey, Hartung, Bryen, Hofmann, Sutherland, Riopelle, Guiette, Soulages, Serpan, Graves, Brauner, Ubac, De Kooning, Appel, Gillet, Rothko, Sam Francis, Ronet, Russell, Arnal, Phillip Martin, Capogrossi, Dova, Kline, the sculptors Germaine Richier, Maria, Baskine, Butler, Paolozzi, Kopac, and Claire Falkenstein.<sup>179</sup>

Parish describes at length Dubuffet's and Michaux's negative reactions against the 'poorly written classification.' In *L'Informel: Mode d'emploi*, an influential exhibition and accompanying catalogue that explore the work of many different artists using Georges Bataille's notion of 'l'informe', an *unravelling*, rather than a progressive control, of form, Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois call the contemporary literature about *l'art informel* 'deplorable': describing it as 'high-

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 56. Wols's own work will be discussed below.

<sup>178</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' in *Darmstädter Beiträge* (1961); republished and revised in *Quasi una Fantasia* (1963); GS 16 (1978), pp. 493-540

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 56: 'J'ai désigné provisoirement cette aventure SIGNIFIANCE DE L'INFORMEL: y ont magistralement participé par l'esprit de leurs recherches (mais sans aucune pensée de travail collectif, et tant mieux, dans tous les sens: Tobey, Hartung, Bryen, Hofmann, Sutherland, Riopelle, Guiette, Soulages, Serpan, Graves, Brauner, Ubac, De Kooning, Appel, Gillet, Rothko, Sam Francis, Ronet, Russell, Arnal, Phillip Martin, Capogrossi, Dova, Kline, les sculpteurs Germaine Richier, Maria, Baskine, Butler, Paolozzi, Kopac, et Claire Falkenstein.'

flown generality, metaphysical bran, satiated with adjectives and metaphor, rhetorical flurries, and wind (and especially, not the slightest effort of historical analysis).<sup>180</sup>

### **Formel/informel, informal/formless: preliminary considerations**

What is important, however, is precisely this tension between the formal/formalized and the informal/formless at the centre of the conception of these different artists' creations. However, the critical element, directed against the *provisory* classification of their work under its catch-all guise – be it *art informel* or *art autre*, has somehow been transported into the practice of the composers of *musique informelle*. Adorno's reference to the manifestos of the French avant-garde in his 'Vers une musique informelle' implies this lack of precision, especially its grand gesture of stating its proponents' work as new, or at least different (as opposed to what is traditional and received). Not only did he fear that a new order had been bestowed upon the postwar music – in its serial conception – but that the other music was largely uncategorized – if one only thinks of the differences between the music of Cage, Ligeti, Stockhausen, Feldman and Xenakis – like the artists unwittingly grouped under Tapié's banner of *art informel*. This lack of definition is also apparent in Adorno's own conception of *musique informelle*, as if the precursors he mentions – including Schoenberg's *Erwartung* – could not guarantee a real *musique autre*. It can neither be explained from the point of view of ignorance – Adorno knew most of these composers from performances at Darmstadt and elsewhere – nor from the position of a possible future music alone. From an aesthetic point of view, *musique informelle* had already appeared before it was named. Adorno's terminology can therefore rather be seen as the inspiration for a new aesthetic,

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<sup>180</sup> 'La littérature de l'époque sur ce que l'on a appelé l'art informel est en général déplorable: des généralités ampoulées, du bran métaphysique, de l'adjectif et de la métaphore à satiété, des flonflons rhétoriques, du vent (et surtout, pas le moindre effort d'analyse historique).'



as Gianmario Borio argues.<sup>181</sup> In that sense, finding a true, hidden meaning of the original concept – as a universal category – is of little import to the larger question of what the function is of Adorno’s concept (its ‘besogne’ or ‘job’ as Bataille would call it).<sup>182</sup> In that sense, an aesthetic which includes the informelle/informe and the formalizations which go against the idea of a historically necessary form (as a closed-circuit process, applied irrespective of the sound material and its environment), or structuring strategies (which can be equally restrictive). The ‘precedence of matter over form’ does, however, not mean that formal thinking has become obsolete altogether; the serial composers had already had to admit (their endeavour to create a music organized by rows of 12 pitches, eventually including matrices of 12 rhythms, 12 articulations, 12 dynamic markings, etc.) that a clear structuring process does not necessarily lead to an articulated form.

In the music of Morton Feldman, this tension between the sound and its articulation changed with the composition of *In Search of an Orchestration*, as he said in the fourth Radio Happening – a friendly exchange of ideas with John Cage on a number of topics – when he made it clear that the articulation of form by means of sounds was no longer a musical requirement. In fact, he avoided the traditional formal indicators completely: no more opening and closing gestures,

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<sup>181</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion of Borio’s position

<sup>182</sup> George Bataille defined this term in his article ‘Informe.’ As Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield explains, it is not to be confused with the meaning of the use of the word, but its ‘thingness’: ‘La “besogne,” telle que la définit Bataille dans l’article “Informe”, n’est pas ce qui relève de la signification voire de l’usage du mot, mais ce qui, ayant trait à sa *choséité* – son poids historique et sa matérialité signifiante – met en jeu ces effet toxiques. Quand à “l’aspect” que Bataille introduit dans “Le Langage des Fleurs”, et qu’il veut substituer au mot, c’est ce qui, frappant les yeux des humains et introduisant dans la conscience la “présence réelle” de l’objet, tire le langage dans la direction de la “nature et de ses obscures décisions”: la mort, l’excès, la pourriture.’ In Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield, *Georges Bataille, la terreur et les lettres*, (Villeneuve d’Asq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009), p. 33. Bataille’s interest in the seductive qualities of the monstrous and the ‘informe’ can be situated in the context of a brutal materialism and his break with surrealism. See Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 32

including dynamic articulation (Cage remarked there were still some louder sound complexes in *Intersections*). In a sense, this leveling of gestures articulating formally important moments in the composition were not only removed from his compositional technique, the idea that these mnemonic tools – to remind the audience something was about to begin, change, or had come to an end – were seen as elements of a linguistic conception of musical composition, to which the creation of meaning – through repetition, variation and transformation of the same motifs, themes and harmonic complexes – was central.

### Adorno and the crisis of the work concept

It is with regard to the ‘complex(es) of meaning’<sup>183</sup> in musical works of art, and how they may or may not be language-like in their construction and form, that the position of Adorno can be expounded. Adorno’s analysis of the critical position of the artwork is important, precisely as it takes into account the musical post-war avant-garde. As a conceptual and historiographical framework, his theories have been rejected by some music historians, most notably, by Hermann Danuser.<sup>184</sup> In *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, he contended that they are ‘little suited as an historiographical foundation; they must rather be considered as an object of historiography [themselves].’<sup>185</sup> However, as the German musicologist Hellmut Federhofer argues, Adorno’s influence on composers’ practice would suggest that this is arguably not a justifiable restriction.<sup>186</sup> He explains that through the contact with contemporary composers, from Schoenberg and Webern onwards, but especially the composers of the 1950s and 1960s, Adorno came to occupy an influential position, both as an authority and a critic, whose concepts were received by the Darmstadt summer course audience. The history of this reception of Adorno’s work is a double-edged sword. Important figures like Pierre Boulez, for example, infamously wrote that ‘any musician who has not experienced – I do not say understood, but truly experienced – the necessity of dodecaphonic language is USELESS. For his entire work brings

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<sup>183</sup> Carl Dahlhaus argues in this regard that Adorno was not perfectly clear: ‘The term “context of meaning”, one of the basic categories in Adorno’s aesthetics, is an ambiguous concept inasmuch as it remains an open question whether the context as such already guarantees meaning or whether the expressive or gestural meaning associated with amusical motif fits into a context which then defines and modifies it – similarly to the way a word fits in a sentence.’ Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, translated by Derrick Puffett and Andrew Clayton, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 160

<sup>184</sup> Hermann Danuser, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, Vol. 7), (Laaber, Laaber Verlag, 1984)

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p. 300. As quoted by Hellmut Federhofer, ‘Das negative Kunstwerk in der Musikphilosophie Adornos,’ in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (1990), pp. 247-263: ‘[...] eignen sich wenig für ein historiographisches Fundament, sie müssen vielmehr als Gegenstand der Geschichtsschreibung betrachtet werden.’

<sup>186</sup> Hellmut Federhofer, ‘Das negative Kunstwerk in der Musikphilosophie Adornos,’ *op. cit.*, pp. 247-263

him up short of the needs of his time.’<sup>187</sup> Boulez subsequently sought to employ earlier Adornoian concepts in order to justify his own ideological position,<sup>188</sup> yet ignored the more critical position that Adorno took subsequently in texts such as ‘The Ageing of New Music’. Federhofer points out that the question as to the meaning of the concepts themselves, including the work of art, received a ‘completely new answer’ through this exchange, and ‘unwittingly revalued the avant-garde and lifted it as a cultural-political factor into collective consciousness.’<sup>189</sup>

Most importantly, Adorno saw that traditional conceptions of the artwork as it had developed since the late eighteenth century<sup>190</sup> – which variously defined it as unitary, organic, autonomous, self-sufficient, imitating nature, and answering to various aesthetic laws of beauty, the sublime and truth, had come under pressure. These pressures were not simply external, but were revealed as inherent in the artwork itself, and were manifest in an increasing fragmentation of its

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<sup>187</sup> Pierre Boulez, ‘Possibly...’ (1952), p. 113

<sup>188</sup> Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, p. 52-53 Campbell writes that ‘the question of the historical or ahistorical nature of serialism was not so easily settled, however, and in “Aesthetics and the Fetishists” (1961), Boulez again refers to the ‘refusal to accept history and the historical perspective’ as a criticism which has been made against him. Calling upon Adorno for support, he reflects that a composer must draw out the consequences which are implicit in the language which has been inherited, and he postulates the existence of ‘a dialectical relationship between history and the individual’ in which history provides a challenge for the individual while the individual is charged with reconfiguring history in some kind of irreversible way. Caught up in this dialectic, it is consequently impossible for the composer to be independent of his time.’

<sup>189</sup> Federhofer, *op. cit.*, p. 247-248: ‘Der enorme Einfluss, den Adorno im persönlichen Verkehr mit zahlreichen Komponisten auf die Praxis ausübte, lässt eine solche Einschränkung kaum gerechtfertigt erscheinen. Denn mit Schönberg und Webern, an deren Schaffen die Avantgarde anknüpfte, gewann Adorno als kritische Instanz zugleich Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Neuen Musik während der Fünfziger- und Sechzigerjahre. Die Frage nach ihrem Sinn erfuhr durch ihn eine vollkommen neue Beantwortung, die zwar nicht Schönbergs Zustimmung fand, aber unversehens die Avantgarde ästhetisch aufwertete und als kulturpolitischen Faktor in das allgemeine Bewusstsein erhob.’

<sup>190</sup> As I have mentioned before, for a discussion of the musical work of art, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, *op. cit.*

material.<sup>191</sup> Adorno himself made this crisis of the traditional work-concept – to the extent that he even spoke of the ‘jolting of the “work”’<sup>192</sup> *in se* – one of the central tenets of his argument in *Philosophy of New Music*<sup>193</sup>:

The transformations that music has undergone during the past 30 years have scarcely been recognized to their full extent. (...) The thought of future renewal, whether in the form of great and consummate artworks or of the blessed accord of music and society, simply denies what has happened and can be suppressed but not undone. Under the constraint of its own objective logic music critically cancelled the idea of the consummate artwork and severed its tie with the public.<sup>194</sup>

For Adorno the reason for the crisis of the concept of the artwork may refer to the societal upheaval of the period, although not in a reflective – and thus a naive – representational fashion:

Today, however, this movement has turned against the closed work and everything that it implies. The sickness that has befallen the idea of the work may stem from the social condition that does not offer what would be binding and confirming enough to guarantee the harmony of the self-sufficient work. The prohibitive difficulties of the work, however, are revealed not in reflection on them but in the dark interior of the work itself.<sup>195</sup>

Other authors, including the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus<sup>196</sup> have understood this as a central issue concerning the work of art in the twentieth century. Christoph Hubig,<sup>197</sup> defines Dahlhaus’s

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<sup>191</sup> See, amongst others, Reinhard, Kager, ‘Einheit in der Zersplitterung. Überlegung zu Adornos Begriff des “musikalischen Materials”,’ in Richard Klein and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (eds.), *Mit Den Ohren Denken. Adornos Philosophie der Musik*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 92-114; see also Max Paddison, ‘Chapter 4: A Material Theory of Form,’ in *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, op. cit. Paddison shows how Adorno analyzed Alban Berg’s *Pianosonata*, Op. 1 to support this theorization of the material as increasingly fragmented.

<sup>192</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 29: ‘Jolting of the “Work.”’ See also page 4 of this thesis.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 34

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>196</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Über den Zerfall des musikalischen Werkbegriffs,’ in *Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik*, (1971), p. 9-26

conceptualization of the work as an ‘intentional object [*intentionales Gegenstand*]’ of production, [whilst] reception reflects the status of the ‘musical material’ in an intentional way. [Dahlhaus] criticizes this ‘phony peace,’ based on the division of labour, between an aesthetics of the work, social history as well as reception-historical research and often postulates their ‘dialectical mediation’ in light of historical processes.’<sup>198</sup>

As I will argue, the elaborations of Adorno already related the solving of the problem of the ‘organic’ work of art as a historical construct, embedded in and mediated by historical processes. In Adorno’s view, the antithesis to this traditional concept is to be found in the serial work concept which, however, is a problematic conceptualization in itself because of its strict organizational principles derived solely from the series, which Adorno terms *mechanical*. The series is portrayed as an immanent part of the composition and therefore pretending to be *natural*, or to paraphrase Adorno, having become second nature. One of the architects of serial compositional technique, the composer Pierre Boulez, developed a conceptual framework for this technique; its aim is to limit the composer’s available arsenal of tools to a series of twelve

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<sup>197</sup> Christoph Hubig studied with Dahlhaus. His thesis was titled *Dialektik und Wissenschaftslogik*, (Berlin, 1978); in 1983 he received his Habilitation with a thesis on *Handlung – Identität – Verstehen* in Weinheim.

<sup>198</sup> Christoph Hubig, ‘„Tragödie der Kultur“ revisited: Carl Dahlhaus’ Konzeption des Kunstwerks als Alternative zur Simmel-Cassirer-Kontroverse’ (Stuttgart): ‘Dahlhaus wiederum, an Droysen, Ingarden sowie kritisch an Adorno orientiert, begreift ‘Werk’ als ‘intentionalen Gegenstand’ von Produktion, und Rezeption reflektiert den Status des ‘musikalischen Materials’ intentionalistisch. Er kritisiert einen arbeitsteiligen ‘faulen Frieden’ zwischen Werkästhetik, Sozialgeschichte sowie Rezeptionsforschung und fordert regelmässig deren ‘dialektische Vermittlung’ in Ansehung der historischen Prozesse.’ *Carl Dahlhaus: Werk, Wirkung, Aktualität – Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung Berlin, 10-13 Juni 2008*, p. 5. Hubig’s paper at the Dahlhaus conference was one of several focussing on the work concept in Dahlhaus. The others debating this issue were Albrecht Wellmer (*Überlegungen zum Werkbegriff*) and Gianmaria Borio (*Über den sozialen Gehalt des musikalischen Werkes*). The latter’s position will be discussed in more detail below. It is also worth mentioning that the *Festschrift* published for Dahlhaus’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday refers to this central focus on the musical artwork, as it is titled Hermann Danuser, Helga De la Motte-Haber, Leopold Miller (eds.), *Das musikalische Kunstwerk. Geschichte - Ästhetik - Theorie. Festschrift Carl Dahlhaus zum 60. Geburtstag*, (Laaber, Laaber Verlag, 1988)

chromatic tones, extending this logic to other musical parameters, equally to be organized in series of twelve.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, he states that the series is the dominant force in not only offering the composer this new vocabulary, but also as a structuring method. Form, and temporal unfolding, are a byproduct of a series of durations. This, he observes, is also a reaction to the traditional formal schemes, which are considered to be pre-existing entities, in other words (uncritically) received devices or clichés which outline the shape or ‘morphology’ of the material:

Today’s serial thinking emphasizes that the series has to generate not only the vocabulary, but must also apply to the structure of the work; [this] has to do with a comprehensive counter-reaction against classical thinking which conceives of form, just as general morphology, as something preexistent. Serial thinking knows no given ranking orders or general structures in which a certain thought is cast, on the contrary: the composer who helps himself to a determined methodology, creates out of his expressive needs every time the objects which he requires, and the necessary form to organize these objects. Classical tonal thinking relies on a world view which is determined by the laws of gravitation and attraction; serial thinking is based on a world of unceasing expansion.<sup>200</sup>

The principal issue is the concept of the series as a historically necessary and logical consequence in relation to the crisis of the work of art in the twentieth century. In this integral serialist view, the organization of musical material can only be achieved by adherence to the central concept of

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<sup>199</sup> For a comprehensive, critical analysis of the development of Boulez's thought see Campbell, E., *Boulez*. For an account of this generation of composers, see Célestin Deliège, *De Darmstadt à l'IRCAM. Cinquante ans de modernité musicale*.

<sup>200</sup> Pierre Boulez, in ... (1961), quoted by Borio, *op. cit.*: ‘Das heutige serielle Denken hebt mit Nachdruck hervor, dass die Reihe nicht nur das Vokabular zu erzeugen hat, sondern sich auch auf die Struktur des Werkes erstrecken muss; man hat es also mit einer umfassenden Gegenreaktion auf das klassische Denken zu tun, welche die Form, ebenso wie die allgemeine Morphologie, als etwas Präexistentes ansieht. Das serielle Denken kennt keine vorgegebene Rangordnungen oder allgemeine Strukturen, in die einer bestimmtes Gedanke eingegossen wird, im Gegenteil: der Komponist, der sich einer determinierter Methodologie bedient, schafft sich für seinen Ausdruckswillen jedesmal die Objekte, deren er bedarf, und die notwendige Form zur Organisation dieser Objekte. Das klassische tonale Denken beruft auf einen Weltbild, das durch die Gesetze von Schwerkraft und Anziehung bestimmt ist; das serielle Denken gründet sich auf eine Welt in unaufhörlicher Expansion.’

the series. In particular, it is propagated as an immanent musical device, not as an extramusical imposition; moreover, the primacy of pitch is conceived of as *primus inter pares* amongst the other parametric series. Boulez attempted to define this in *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, a canonical work on serial technique, as follows:

In this respect, I want to remind [of the fact] that it seems to me necessary to conceive the interchangeability of sound elements as a structural basic phenomenon; at the same time, it is necessary to underline that they are organized following a process of a diminishing order of priority. I abandon the idea of using the word hierarchy here which implies a subordination, in a way, while these phenomena are indeed independent, if not in their existence, at least in their evolution: they obey a common principle of organization of structures, whilst their procreation demonstrates the divergences provoked by their own character. With the aim of a dialectics of composition, the order of priority appears to me to come back to the pitch and to duration, dynamics and timbre belonging to the second order categories.<sup>201</sup>

Boulez claimed not only that the parameters of pitch, duration, dynamics and timbre are interchangeable – which, given a neutral exchange value, would allow for their equality – but, at the same time, claims pitch as the most important one – which, obviously, he cannot avoid given that the series rests not on the number twelve as such, but on the twelve *pitches* of the chromatic total. It would seem arbitrary, for example, to limit the number of timbres in a composition to twelve, let alone use this number as the basis for any other parametric series. In fact, this shows

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<sup>201</sup> Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, (Gonthier, Mainz, 1963), p. 37: 'À ce propos, je tiens à le rappeler, il me semble indispensable de concevoir l'interchangeabilité des composantes sonores comme un phénomène structurel de base; dans le même temps, il nous faut souligner qu'elles s'organisent suivant une progression d'une primordialité décroissante. Je renonce à employer ici le mot de hiérarchie qui implique, en quelque sorte, une subordination, alors que ces phénomènes sont réellement indépendants, sinon dans leur existence, du moins dans leur évolution: ils obéissent à un principe commun d'organisation des structures, cependant que leur engendrement manifeste des divergences suscitées par leur caractères propres. En vue d'une dialectique de la composition, la primordialité me paraît revenir à la hauteur et à la durée, l'intensité et le timbre appartenant à des catégories d'ordre second.'



how the built-in hierarchy is not only necessary, but itself arbitrary. That it is a hierarchical system indeed becomes apparent from the lines immediately following the above passage, as Boulez attempts to find support for his position via a historical rationalization, both in musical practice and the history of notation:

The history of *universal* [my stress] musical practice guarantees these functions of diminishing importance, which notation confirms by [showing] the different stages of its transformation. Pitch systems and rhythmic systems, concurrently, always appear as highly developed and consistent, while it would often be troublesome to draw out theories codified on [the basis] of dynamics or timbres, abandoned most often for [reasons of] pragmatism or ethics [...].<sup>202</sup>

Although Boulez uses the series in his early works in a thematic way, Edward Campbell argues that ‘the basic series or pitch collection has become a source of qualities, which Boulez abstracts from it and combines,’<sup>203</sup> including the manipulation of the temporal dimension. Although he moved away from the more mechanical and automatic results dictated by the series, Boulez nevertheless legitimates serialism via a claim as to its historical necessity in the aftermath of the postwar period’s turn away from the earlier dodecaphonic and neo-classical compositional systems. As noted, this historical movement is qualified as *natural*; its opponents including those composers holding onto earlier compositional theories as well as those who develop different compositional strategies, are seen as opposing history itself; they are *anti-historical*.<sup>204</sup> Boulez attempts to justify this position by taking recourse to, as seen above, historicized rationalizations,

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 37 : ‘L’histoire de la pratique musicale universelle se porte garante de ces fonctions d’importance décroissante, ce que la notation vient de confirmer par les différentes étapes de sa transformation. Les systèmes de hauteurs et les systèmes rythmiques, concurremment, apparaissent toujours comme hautement développés et cohérent, alors qu’on serait souvent en peine de dénicher des théories codifiées pour les dynamiques ou les timbres, abandonnés le plus souvent au pragmatisme ou à l’éthique (ainsi de nombreux tabous en ce qui concerne l’emploi de certains instruments ou de la voix.’

<sup>203</sup> Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 217

<sup>204</sup> Pierre Boulez, ‘Possibly ...’, 1952, p. 113; see also Pierre Boulez, ‘Aesthetics and the Fetishists’ (1961), in *Orientations.: Collected Writings*, (Harvard, Cambridge (MA), 1990), p. 39-40

and, moreover, he calls ‘upon Adorno for support, [by reflecting] that a composer must draw out the consequences which are implicit in the language which has been inherited,’<sup>205</sup> whilst postulating the existence of ‘a dialectical relationship between history and the individual’<sup>206</sup> in which ‘history provides a challenge for the individual while the individual is charged with reconfiguring history in some kind of irreversible way.’<sup>207</sup> Campbell concludes that as he is ‘caught up in this dialectic, it is consequently impossible for the composer to be independent of his time.’<sup>208</sup>

Adorno’s own theorizations address the question of the status of the concept of the work *after* this upheaval. In his view, the traditional organic conceptualization of music – in which all parts are elements of an organic whole and replaced by the serial compositional system – is to be reinvented in the concept of *musique informelle*. Adorno, reading the visual artworks of the *informelle Kunst*, associated with artists such as Wols (whose original name was Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze)<sup>209</sup> could lead a way out of this crisis:

But following the liquidation of the organic language of music, music once again, thanks to its immanent organization, has become the very image of the organic. There is an analogy here to certain striking thematic tendencies in contemporary painters like Schultze and Ness [sic]. For music the organic ideal would be nothing but a rejection of the mechanical. It would be the concrete process of

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<sup>205</sup> Edward Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 217

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Wols, (1913-1951). Ian Chilvers and John Graves-Smith (eds.), *Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 759-760

a growing unity [*werdenden Einheit*] of parts and whole and not their subsumption under a supreme abstract concept, together with the juxtaposition of the parts.<sup>210</sup>

Although Campbell observes the vague aspect of Adorno's concept,<sup>211</sup> even as presented in the late writings, he does not actually follow this through in the way Borio does. As I will argue, the aspect of this Hegelian synthesis in historical terms, and the pretension of a 'redemption-within-reach' can function as a critique of a historicist and idealist conceptualizations of historical time, as well as musical temporality.

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<sup>210</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' p. 307 (English translation); GS Band 16, p. 527 in the original German.

<sup>211</sup> See for example p. 91 in 'Late Adorno: 1964-1969': 'In "Difficulties" (1964), Adorno reconsiders some of the issues previously tackled in "The Ageing" and in "Vers une musique informelle." While Boulez and Stockhausen were still committed to serialism, he retained his misgivings about the "total determination," "progressive rationalization" and "reification" which he believed were implicit to it and on this basis he reasserts that the ageing of new music was taking place, and that "the best" of his Darmstadt colleagues, who were unhappy with this view in 1954, now seemed to be mostly in agreement with it.' (See Adorno, 2002, p. 656-9) Campbell estimates that 'Boulez is, presumably, counted among their number.' Boulez, in his Darmstadt lectures 'reprises the criticisms of serial practice, which he first formulated in 'Current Investigations'.' Campbell concludes that 'while *musique informelle* or a-serialism remains the goal towards which new music should be working, he is as unable as before to define it with any degree of precision other than to say that it could serve to relate the wealth of integral serialist detail to the composed whole.'

### Key aspects of *musique informelle* I: form

Adorno's encounter with *art informel* proved fruitful for his attempt to theorize a comparable *musique informelle*, in which he sought to address the question of how the modernist musical artwork could resist totalizing tendencies in the integral serialist musical language – and especially in regard of musical form. As we have seen, in early integral serial compositions, form tended to become a mere by-product of the series. For Adorno, this was unsatisfactory: he identified a contradiction between the quest to total compositional determinism and the neglect of formal considerations. In propounding the notion of *musique informelle*, he sought to overcome the problems inherent in the traditional organic conceptualization of music in which all parts are elements of an organic whole, and which had been replaced by the serial compositional system. Beyond the influences already established by the different authors above, a final source of inspiration should be mentioned: the so-called 'intuitive drawings' of the artist Wols. According to the art historian Delphine Bière,

From the early 1930s to 1951, Wols experimented with the possibilities of drawing on the trajectory of the hand on the 'very small sheet to comprise the world.'<sup>212</sup> In this reduced transformed flat space, in which the line comes unmoored and unravels the representation process, unstable meandering forms, to life. Hesitatingly, the drawing explores a variety of undetermined relations, rejecting the external representation of the pictorial object to invent new forms.<sup>213</sup>

Wols was active across a wide range of media, including photography, painting and writing and was well-read in fields extending beyond the visual arts, such as music, zoology, botany and Eastern philosophies. However, he attempted to break down the barrier between the different arts. Bière writes that for him

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<sup>212</sup> Wols and Hans Joachim Petersen, *Wols: die Aphorismen* (Munich, Schirmer Mosel), p. 32 (i.e. aphorism No. 70)

<sup>213</sup> Wols, Delphine Bière-Chauvel and Lieu d'art et action contemporaine de Dunkerque, *Wols, dessins* (Paris, Archibooks), p. 14

Each medium determines what the others were not, at the same time striving for the decompartmentalization of genres that defines the multiple, varied nature of Wols' output. His various artistic activities interact, defying any categorization while revealing the same instability in their constituent elements. The relations between his practices and methods and gender conflicts, are a rejection of restrictive professionalization and of the linear in an artistic process, but always pertaining to the study of the material aspect of natural phenomena.<sup>214</sup>

Furthermore, she argues in *Representations: A mental image* that Wols explored the possibilities of 'psychic automatism' as preached by the Surrealists in the 1930s, as well as their use of dreams. According to Bière, Wols' drawings 'repudiate representation, but not the representation of the mental image.'<sup>215</sup> She points out that although 'his watercolours are populated with figures, landscapes and characters,'<sup>216</sup> they have 'no counterpart in the real world, other than certain recurrent clues.'<sup>217</sup> She adds that 'the precise, assured graphic style does not override the ambiguity of the objects – hybrid beings subject to the metamorphoses and otherworldly situations imposed by the painter.'<sup>218</sup> In contrast to traditional *representational* art, Wols 'perceives nature in relation to his own inner world, and the artwork as the medium for a visual process nourished by the mental image.'<sup>219</sup> In her view, the 'outer natural world' has been 'transformed by the inner vision.'<sup>220</sup> Wols' art occupies a 'phantasmagorical realm' which 'takes on its own physiognomy, manifested by the quality of the medium, in particular the line.'<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 16

Wols' style underwent a change after his internment as a German national from September 1939 to October 1940; rather than recognizable objects, he started making collages. As Bière analyses the drawing *The Feet* (1939), she sees that

the line becomes both outline and link, lending the massed and amalgamated figures an enigmatic presence. As the vector of expression and sole element unifying the whole, it heightens the presence of the transformed, intertwined objects and beings, fixing them in an undefined spatial position. The watercolour proceeds by associations of “visual remnants” and isolated objects (a crank, a brick wall, an insect, etc.) that lose their identity as things to become a composite whole, denoting the distance between fantasy and an idea.<sup>222</sup>

In other words, Wols' style does not impose a pre-arranged form, but allows for associations and amalgamations of disparate elements, though at the same time preserving a certain degree of figurative recognizability, however dream-like or illogical their interrelations may appear.

Adorno was quick to notice the significance of Wols' artistic practice, and saw that it could open up new creative possibilities for composers. This is explicitly confirmed by a key passage in *Vers une musique informelle*, in which he comes closest to offering a definition of the concept in musical terms, as I have argued before, where he compares how music has become the ‘very image of the organic’ once more, analogous with the work of Wols, ‘nothing but a rejection of the mechanical.’<sup>223</sup> The traditional conception of the ‘organic’ work of art, in which the details in themselves only become meaningful through their interaction with the form, were to be abolished in *musique informelle*, admittedly in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung* or ‘sublation.’ *Musique informelle* would, historically at least, have gone through the serial negation by means of the ‘mechanical,’ in which an abstract superstructure – or global form – generates the individual

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>223</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle,’ p. 307 (English translation); GS Vol. 16, p. 527 in the original German. See above, p. 77

elements, to then be linked without reciprocal connection. The *musique informelle* that Adorno proposed would not pursue a simple restitution of the ‘organic’ work of art, but the re-adoption of the idea of the organic through an advancing process of unification in the work. Rather, *musique informelle*, was to be

a type of music which has discarded all forms which are external or abstract or which confront it in an inflexible way. At the same time, although such music should be completely free of anything irreducibly alien to itself or superimposed on it, it should nevertheless constitute itself in an objectively compelling way, in the musical substance itself, and not in terms of external laws.<sup>224</sup>

The question of musical form in the twentieth century is a central preoccupation in Adorno’s aesthetics, and in order to grasp more fully the significance of the observations cited above, they must be read in conjunction with a number of other texts that articulate a critique of traditional forms. A major theme of the collection *Quasi una fantasia*, of which *Vers une musique informelle* is the final essay, is the reification of these forms, and I shall consider these writings in more detail later in the thesis. For the moment, I shall confine myself to discussing Adorno’s discussion of this question in one particularly important and illuminating source, the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, as this text continues to explore the issues concerning form that were raised in *Vers une musique informelle*.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno returned once more to the question of form in relation to the modernist artwork. His thinking on this question had derived fresh stimulus from his encounter with the work of Samuel Beckett (especially *The Unnameable* and *Endgame*),<sup>225</sup> which renewed his interest in the musical avant-garde and the possibility for the musical artwork to reinvent itself.

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<sup>224</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 272

<sup>225</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Versuch das Endspiel zu verstehen,’ in Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Noten zur Literatur*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 281-321; for further reading, see Hans-Dieter König, *Neue Versuche, Becketts Endspiel zu verstehen. Sozialwissenschaftliches Interpretieren Nach Adorno*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996)

(Again, I will return to examine Adorno's engagement with Beckett's work later.) His discussion of form underwent further elaboration in relation to fundamental themes of his work, and particularly his continuing exploration of the dialectic between society and the avant-garde musical artwork. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno connects the idea that social relations are sedimented in the artwork with the changed imagery of the industrial era, first referring to concepts presented in Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction* and the implications for the artwork of increasing technification:

What hits the mark in the various reflections on art in what journalists call the technological age, which is just as much marked by the social relations of production as by the level of productive forces, is not so much the adequacy of art to technical development as the transformation of the experiential forms sedimented in artworks.<sup>226</sup>

For Adorno the experience of art as mimesis can no longer express a pre-industrial world – in which the natural was not fully dominated – in its images:

The question is that of the aesthetic world of imagery: pre-industrial imagery irretrievably had to collapse. The sentence with which Benjamin's reflections on surrealism began – 'it no longer feels right to dream about the blue flower'<sup>227</sup> – gets to the heart of the matter. Art is mimesis of the world of imagery and at the same time its enlightenment through forms of control.<sup>228</sup>

The 'blue flower' mentioned by Adorno is symbol for romantic longing and refers to the 'blaue Blume' of Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.<sup>229</sup> The world to which it refers seems lost, or at least its imagery no longer accessible for the world of art to represent. What penetrates into every aspect of experience in this regard, is the loss of immediacy, especially the experience of nature:

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<sup>226</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 218

<sup>227</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, Vol. 1, (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1955), p. 423

<sup>228</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 219

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373



That today any walk in the woods, unless elaborate plans have been made to seek out the most remote forests, is accompanied by the sound of jet engines overhead not only destroys the actuality of nature as, for instance, an object of poetic celebration.[...] This may help clarify the anorganic aspect of Beckett's as well as of Celan's poetry.<sup>230</sup>

The images of the postindustrial world are, according to Adorno, those of a corpse.<sup>231</sup> He had already mentioned these strong affinities between Beckett's work and music in *Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait*. 'Beckett's "*je vais continuer*", with which his novel of despair [*The Unnameable*] comes to an end, without our being able to say whether that end is still one of despair, neatly encapsulates a factor unifying modern literature and music of every kind.'<sup>232</sup> Subsequently, Adorno shows how certain modernist movements attempt to maintain the now impossible idea of an aesthetic universal, even if 'an element of universality cannot be eliminated from technique any more than from the movement of nominalism as a whole.'<sup>233</sup> Adorno refers specifically to two different artistic media and styles:

Cubism and composition with twelve tones related only to one another are, in terms of their idea, universal procedures in the age of the negation of aesthetic universality. The tension between objectivating technique and the mimetic essence of artworks is fought out in the effort to save the fleeting, the ephemeral, the transitory in a form that is immune to reification and yet akin to it in being permanent.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 219

<sup>231</sup> The idea of the world as rotting or as dead is one found in the work of other writers, as mentioned above. Georges Bataille's critique of surrealism (as propounded by André Breton) resulted in a similar materialism, although of a rather more crude type. See Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield, *op. cit.*

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Adorno, *op. cit.*

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

It is here that Adorno recognizes the temporality at the heart of art's truth content, lost in genres such as nature poetry, as explained above.<sup>235</sup> More important even, is the idea of the dialectic of technique and experience – one which is seen as the notion of systems and system building on the one hand (Adorno refers here to cubism and dodecaphony, rather different in their conceptions and domains of painting and music) – and the notion of a temporal unfolding of the experience of the transitory. In other words, art is seen as both an attempt to capture the fleetingness of experience and to survive artistically in a more permanent fashion. This tension can be seen in musical terms as one of the central concerns of the composers studied in this thesis. Morton Feldman, for one, spoke of the 'incomprehensibility' of the material, and how technique can only 'structure' it.<sup>236</sup> Xenakis, for example, proposes the notion of a *formalized* music, not to create yet another immutable composition-technical system, but to bring to light tendencies already present in the material which can be understood from a statistical point of view. At another level, the tension, for Xenakis, consists of the search for universals in an age of the negation of universals, however, not to re-establish them uncritically. His rather brave attempt to formalize, as we will see, is always balanced with the recognition of intuition. Adorno noted this tendency:

Incidentally, art's impulse to objectivize the fleeting, not the permanent, may well run through the whole of its history. Hegel failed to recognize this and for this reason, in the midst of dialectics, failed to recognize the temporal core of art's truth content.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Adorno clearly refers to his critique of Hegel as presented in the opening pages of *Aesthetic Theory*, to which he returns here. See above in this chapter concerning the artwork's transitoriness.

<sup>236</sup> See Chapter 6 of this thesis. Feldman discusses a number of related issues in the essay Morton Feldman, 'Between Categories (1969),' in B.H. Friedman (ed.), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street, Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, (Cambridge, MA, Exact Change, 2000), pp. 83-89

<sup>237</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 219

In the next passage of the same part of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno continues this inquiry into the mediation of the universal and the particular from the point of view of form. Keeping in mind the above focus on the mediation of time and truth content at the heart of the work of art, Adorno criticizes the nominalist prescriptions of canonical forms, whilst showing how they functioned historically. Critique in this sense is bound to an assessment of the *adequacy* of forms, in other words how well they reveal *truth*:

Prototypical in this regard is the distinction between closed and open forms, which is relevant to all theory of form. Open forms are those universal genre categories that seek an equilibrium with the nominalistic critique of universality that is founded on the experience that the unity of the universal and the particular, which is claimed by artworks, fundamentally fails.<sup>238</sup>

This refers to the *illusion* created by artworks in their assertion that the sum of their parts amounts to a unified whole, and is mimetic of a world-at-peace – which Adorno refers to as a failure or a lie. This appearance of *wholeness* suggested by traditional formal strategies (for example in the ‘closed’ genre of the sonata) is at the centre of Adorno’s critique. He argues that this illusory whole is undermined by the intrusion of the heterogeneous in (musical) forms:

No pre-given universal unprotestingly receives a particular that does not derive from a genre. The perpetuated universality of forms becomes incompatible with form’s own meaning; the promise of something rounded, overarching, and balanced is not fulfilled. For this is a promise made to what is heterogeneous to the forms, which probably never tolerated identity with them.<sup>239</sup>

Moreover, Adorno argues that forms which ‘rattle on’ after they have become outmoded or reified do ‘injustice’ to the form as described above. Furthermore, he puts forward the idea of a loss of the distinction between form as infused with characteristics and particulars, and form as something rounded, overarching and balanced. In the case that form has ‘become reified with

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 220

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 220

regard to its other,' it is 'no longer form.'<sup>240</sup> The 'reified' form here is therefore distinct from the heterogeneous forms of *musique informelle*, as well as the *formalized* structural procedures pursued by Xenakis, for instance.

Historically, what keeps forms *alive* in this regard, is the constant tension the composer or artist creates between what is expected by the audience and how far such a form can be stretched against the traditional, in order to keep the work's temporal core sufficiently animated. In this connection, it is especially interesting to note Adorno's discussion of nominalism above all in relation to the reification of musical form, a tendency he noted as evinced from the time of the origination of the concept of the artwork itself. Discussing Bach's sense of form, for example, Adorno argues that it 'did not consist in showing respect for traditional forms but rather in keeping them in motion, or better: in not letting them harden in the first place.'<sup>241</sup> Although he sees Bach as an opponent of bourgeois nominalism, Adorno states that he 'was nominalist on the basis of his sense of form.'<sup>242</sup> Vitally, Adorno infers that the nominalist artwork then, 'should become an artwork by being organized from below to above, not by having principles of organization foisted on it.'<sup>243</sup> However, dialectically this bottom-up approach to the organization of form requires a counterweight, as 'no artwork left blindly to itself possesses the power of organization that would set up binding boundaries for itself: investing the work with such a power would in fact be fetishistic[...].'<sup>244</sup> So, even if form is to be created from the material level up, it needs to avoid fetishizing this material as a sufficient creator of meaningful forms – in other words if sounds really would speak for themselves, they would fall back into the world of

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 220

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 220

*Klangreiz* – as pure enjoyment of sounds. Consequently, in the next passage, Adorno shows how the objective element – the artefactual or *made* aspect of artworks – reveals itself, even when attempts are made to create open forms.

The artifactual character of the artwork is incompatible with the postulate of pure relinquishment to the material. By being something made, artworks acquire that element of organization, of being something directed, in the dramaturgical sense, that is anathema to the nominalistic sensibility. The historical aporia of aesthetic nominalism culminates in the insufficiency of open forms, a striking example of which is Brecht's difficulty in writing convincing conclusions to his plays.<sup>245</sup>

Although Adorno is speaking about historical, earlier open forms as well as Brecht's theatre, this aporia becomes rather piquant when seen in the context of *musique informelle*. However, both closed and open forms, which he discusses below, pose problems to the artist, for different reasons. In particular, he contrasts the rondo (an 'open' form) with the sonata (a 'closed' form):

A qualitative leap in the general tendency to open form is, moreover not to be overlooked. The older open forms are based on traditional forms that they modified but from which they maintained more than just the external trappings. The classical Viennese sonata was a dynamic yet closed form, and this closure was precarious; the rondo with the intentional freedom in the alternation of refrain and couplets, was a decidedly open form. [...] The rondo lent itself better to cheap standardization than did the dynamically developing sonata, whose dynamic, in spite of its closure, did not permit typification. The sense of form, which in the rondo at the very least gave the impression of contingency, required guarantees in order not to explode the genre.<sup>246</sup>

In Adorno's opinion, open forms as seen in the work of Bach<sup>247</sup> (the *Presto* of the Italian Concerto), Mozart (notably his *Rondos*), and Beethoven see an increasing tendency towards the

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 221

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> See in this regard Martin Geck, 'Via Beethoven & Schönberg. Theodor W. Adornos Bach-Verständnis,' in Richard Klein and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (eds.), *Mit Den Ohren Denken. Adornos Philosophie der Musik*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 229-240

contingent: in other words, forms are rationalized to such an extent that the elements which did not fit perfectly are progressively eliminated.

Contingency impinged on form. Ultimately, contingency is a function of growing structuration. This explains apparently marginal events such as the temporally contracting scope of musical compositions, as well as the miniature format of Klee's best work. Resignation *vis-a-vis* time and space gave ground to the crisis of nominalistic form until it was reduced to a mere point, effectively inert.<sup>248</sup>

After discussing historical examples of open forms, Adorno returns to the concept of *musique informelle* in connection with the work of the New York painters grouped together under the banner of *action painting* – assumedly, including the work of Jackson Pollock, coined by the critic Harold Rosenberg,<sup>249</sup> and further theorized by Clement Greenberg,<sup>250</sup> who focused on the *objectness* of the productions.<sup>251</sup> Adorno writes:

Resignation vis-à-vis time and space gave ground to the crisis of nominalist form until it was reduced to a mere point, effectively inert. *Action painting*, *l'art informel*, and aleatoric works may have carried the element of resignation to its extreme: the aesthetic subject exempts itself of the burden of giving form to the contingent material it encounters, despairing of the possibility of undergirding it, and instead shifts the responsibility for its organization back to the contingent material itself. The gain here is, however, dubious.<sup>252</sup>

The danger of the contingency of the material (as for example, the idea of letting sound speak for itself), to which the impetus of giving *form* to the work is returned, lies in the resignation of

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<sup>248</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 221

<sup>249</sup> Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters,' in *The London Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, (July 1961)

<sup>250</sup> For an interesting comparison of the positions *vis-à-vis* the avant-garde of Greenberg and Adorno, see Peter Bürger, 'Avant-garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 41, (2010), p. 706

<sup>251</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1961); Robert C. Morgan, (ed.) *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

<sup>252</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 221. See Chapter 2 for a further critique of these artistic movements.

subjectivization – normally considered a problem in Adorno's aesthetics – and the retreat to a level of arbitrariness dictated by the material. In other words, Adorno warns for an overly optimistic development of any new art, as it risks creating yet another new form of false consciousness.<sup>253</sup>

Form purportedly distilled from the contingent and the heterogeneous itself remains heterogeneous and, for the artwork, arbitrary; in its literalness it is alien to art. Statistics<sup>254</sup> are used to console for the absence of traditional forms. This situation holds embedded in itself the figure of its own critique.<sup>255</sup> Finally, for Adorno this double bind, on the one hand the closed-off forms of the past which have outlived their critical potential by becoming static or reified, and on the other hand the open forms even he had momentarily regarded as potentially redemptive in the guise of *musique informelle*, cannot be simply bypassed. This critical insight, however, contains the core of his dialectics of the (nominalist) critical work of art:

Nominalist artworks constantly require the intervention of the guiding hand they conceal in the service of their principle. The extremely objective critique of semblance incorporates an illusory element that is perhaps as irrevocable as the aesthetic semblance of all artworks. Often in artistic products of chance a necessity is sensed to subordinate these works to, effectively, a stylizing procedure of selection.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the implications of this warning. In fact, Gianmario Borio's work refers to this idea of the nominalist aesthetics and the concept of the artwork in this – Adorno's – theory. Borio, *op cit.*, p. 86

<sup>254</sup> It is my speculative reading of this passage that Adorno is not necessarily referring here to the compositional praxis of a composer such as Iannis Xenakis, who famously employed stochastic (or statistic) techniques. Paradoxically, one could claim that Xenakis came to a similar conclusion precisely by finding that which is reified in traditional musical forms, and avoiding the repetition of newly created material based on templates through rigorous calculations, as well as by other means, as I will argue in Chapter 7. However, what is important to note at this point is the absolutes Adorno refers to: total objectivity would potentially eliminate the work as a work of art. The same can be said for the opposite of the totally subjectivised work.

<sup>255</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 221

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

In sum, Adorno argues that this ‘guiding hand’ in the shaping of the work cannot be eradicated without succumbing to total objectification of the material as a static image (an important point to which I shall return in subsequent chapters), or by becoming an utterly reified *cultural object*.



### Key aspects of *musique informelle* II: musical time

The second key aspect of *musique informelle* concerns musical time – the central theme of this thesis. The problem of musical time had become a central preoccupation of the post-war musical avant-garde, and was of particular interest to Adorno, as it was related to his wider philosophical concerns, and especially his thinking on metaphysics as presented in major works such as *Negative Dialectics* and his critique of Heideggerian *Dasein*<sup>257</sup> in *The Jargon of Authenticity*.<sup>258</sup> I shall return to examine the development of Adorno's thinking on time more generally and on musical time in particular in later chapters. Here, I will confine myself to sketching some of its most important features insofar as they have a bearing on the comprehension of his concepts of *musique informelle* and of the modernist musical artwork.

A major influence on Adorno's thinking on time was the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, in particular the distinction Bergson drew between mechanical clock time (*temps espace*) and time as lived or experienced (*temps durée*). The French author and musician Michel Ratté observes that in his discussion of Stockhausen's important article '...how time passes',<sup>259</sup> Adorno 'treats Bergson's distinction between *temps espace* and *temps durée* as an established fact.'<sup>260</sup> Ratté claims that this is the answer to the question of which conception of subjective temporality is the best suited to interpret the temporality that is 'at work' in music. He explains that, for Adorno, musical time is 'simply the Bergsonian duration (*temps durée*),'<sup>261</sup> but does not make clear where

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<sup>257</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Halle a. d. Saale, M. Niemeyer, 1927); Martin Heidegger and Joan Stambaugh, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, (SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy) (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1996)

<sup>258</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, (London, Routledge, 1973)

<sup>259</sup> Karlheinz Stockhausen, '...Wie die Zeit vergeht...', in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 3 (1957); English translation in Karlheinz Stockhausen, '...How time passes...', in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 3. (1959), p. 10-40

<sup>260</sup> Michel Ratté, *op. cit.*, p. 138

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

the latter articulates this position explicitly. Ratté's comments, however, are problematic. The scholar and editor of Bergson's collected writings, Frédéric Worms, argues that Bergson sought to establish that only one of the types of time could be 'correct', which ultimately lead him to

force the unity of everything, in the universe. It is this that he tries to establish, in tracing the moments through mathematical equations when one passes from a purely mathematical point of view [which is] convertible and simultaneous, to conscious points of view which won't be any longer [mathematical], and between which one must choose. It is a form of solipsism which leads him to a form of globalism, when, taking into account the *relations*, would have allowed to think both local singularities and the structure of the whole.<sup>262</sup>

However, in the quotation below on absolute time from *Negative Dialectics* (in the section 'The Concern of Philosophy'), Adorno actually discusses Bergson's thesis, as well as that of Husserl's phenomenology. Firstly, Adorno confronts Bergson's position against universal concepts with his 'irrational' philosophy of immediate intuition, based on a dualistic philosophical framework:

Bergson, in a tour de force, created another type of cognition for non-conceptuality's sake. The dialectical salt was washed away in a differentiated tide of life; solidified reality was disposed off as subaltern, not comprehended along with its subalternity. The hater of the rigid general concept established the cult of irrational immediacy, of sovereign freedom in the midst of unfreedom. He drafted this to cognitive modes in as dualistic an opposition as that of the Cartesian and Kantian doctrines he fought had ever been; the causal-mechanical mode, as pragmatic knowledge, was no

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<sup>262</sup> Frédéric Worms, 'Présentation', in Henri Bergson, Élie During and Frédéric Worms, *Durée et simultanéité. À propos de la théorie d'Einstein* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2009), p. 12: 'Elle ne consiste pas dans le lien entre le système de mesure et de la conscience, mais dans le postulat, que Bergson cherche à établir à même les "équations de Lorentz", qu'un seul de ces systèmes peut être réel à la fois. C'est cette unité de temps, pour ainsi dire, un à la fois, qui le conduit à forcer l'unité du tout, dans l'univers. C'est elle qu'il cherche à établir, en traquant, dans les équations mathématiques, les moments où l'on passe de points de vue purement mathématiques, convertibles, simultanés, à des points de vue conscients qui ne le seraient plus, entre lesquels il faudrait toujours choisir! C'est une forme de solipsisme qui le conduit à une forme de globalisme, alors que la prise en compte des *relations* aurait permis de penser à la fois les singularités locales et la structure du tout.'

more affected by the intuitive one than the bourgeois establishment was by the relaxed and self-consciousness of those who owe their privileges to that establishment.<sup>263</sup>

Adorno then criticizes this immediacy of the intuitions as conflating the *durée* or lived time with the rationalized chronological time (a critique confirmed in the above quotation by Frédéric Worms), and stresses how Bergson's dualism requires what amounts to a dialectical re-conceptualization of the concept of time:

The celebrated intuitions themselves seem rather abstract in Bergson's philosophy; they scarcely go beyond the phenomenal time consciousness which even becomes an underlying chronological physical time-spatial time, according to Bergson's insight. Although it takes an effort to develop, the interactive mode of mental conduct does continue to exist in fact as in the archaic rudiment of mimetic reactions. What preceded its past holds the promise beyond the ossified present. Intuitions succeed only desultorily, however. Every cognition including Bergson's own needs the rationality he scorns, and needs it precisely at the moment of concretion.<sup>264</sup>

In other words, and against the very Bergsonian critique of spatialization – of both time and consciousness – Adorno argues that every fleeting thought, cognition (and, in Benjaminian terms, the experience of artworks), requires precisely a certain degree of reification. Although this is dreaded by Bergson as a form of rationalization of consciousness, it is necessary in order for the experiential to become knowledge.<sup>265</sup> To return to *Vers une musique informelle*, Adorno refers implicitly to the Bergsonian dualist concept of time on several occasions:

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<sup>263</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 8

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> *Negative Dialektik*, p. 324. Adorno argues that Bergson 'hat im Begriff des temps duree, der gelebten Dauer, die lebendige Zeiterfahrung und damit ihr inhaltliches Moment theoretisch zu rekonstruieren versucht, das der Abstraktion der Philosophie und der kausal-mechanischen Naturwissenschaften geopfert war. Gleichwohl ist er so wenig wie diese, positivistischer als seine Polemik wußte, zum dialektischen Begriff übergegangen; hat das dynamische Moment, aus *degoût* gegen die heraufziehende Verdinglichung des Bewußtseins, verabsolutiert, seinerseits gleichsam zu einer Form des Bewußtseins, einer besonderen und privilegierten Erkenntnisweise gemacht, es, wenn man will, zur Branche verdinglicht. Isoliert, wird die subjektive Erlebniszeit samt ihrem Inhalt

Stockhausen becomes aware of it [i.e. the antinomy of material and composition] in the context of the problem of the relationship between physically measurable and authentically musical time.<sup>266</sup>

In another key passage, he also noted that in traditional listening ‘the music unfolds from the parts to the whole, in tune with the flow of time itself. This flow – that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself – has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered.’<sup>267</sup>

Michel Ratté observes in this regard that Bergson’s theory had other important implications for Adorno’s theory of music, drawing attention to two other important passages in *Quasi una fantasia*. The first comes from *Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait*: ‘As a temporal art, music is bound to the fact of succession and is hence as irreversible as time itself. By starting it commits itself to

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so zufällig und vermittelt wie ihr Subjekt, und darum, angesichts der chronometrischen, stets zugleich “falsch”?’ He explains how consciousness may make reparations to ‘time’, if at all possible, what has been done to it under the banner of logic/science. It is indeed part of a larger discussion on the real risks of reification of consciousness, here in the form of *time* consciousness. However, at the same time he admits that time wouldn’t be the same without logic. He explains how Bergson tried to ‘reconstruct’ *temps durée* as lived duration, and the [lived] experience of time. However, at the same time as *temps durée* is being saved from the ‘abstraction of philosophy’ and the causal-mechanical logic of the natural sciences, the concept is not dialectical but self-defeating: what Adorno calls the ‘dynamic element’ [dynamisches Moment] of the concept of *temps durée* is made absolute – in ‘disgust’ or avoidance (Adorno uses the French ‘dégout’) of the reification of consciousness – and therefore loses its dynamic (also described as ‘inhaltliches Moment’ or element of content). In this way it is itself reified into a ‘branch/department’ of the same consciousness, albeit as a particular and privileged form of cognition. *Temps durée* or ‘subjective lived time’ together with its (dynamic) content becomes as coincidental and mediated as its subject, and therefore ‘false’, in view of chronometric time. To explain this, Adorno states that the triviality suffices that the subjective experiences of time, measured by clock-time, are exposed to illusion, although no clock-time would be without the subjective experience of time, which is concretised by this. Adorno argues that no clock time would exist, if it was not for the subjective experience of time, from which it [clock time] was reified.

<sup>266</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle,’ *op. cit.*, p. 288

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 271

carrying on, to becoming something new, to developing.<sup>268</sup> The second is, once more, found in *Vers une musique informelle*: 'It is no doubt true that the phrase about the irreversible nature of history, the wheel of time which cannot be turned back, says everything and nothing.'<sup>269</sup> According to Ratté,<sup>270</sup> Adorno refers here once again to key Bergsonian themes: firstly, music, like the duration of consciousness, constitutes an irreversible succession; and secondly, music, like consciousness, is subjected to the irreversibility of time, but at the same time, it finds the possibility to be free in that the accumulated past exists as experience to it (music). In this way the medium of irreversible time is also evolution: consciousness constantly relates to the complete accumulated past beginning from the new perspectives that are offered at every moment, and the subject finds in this way the possibility to be something else than a past which constitutes its substance only in that it is accumulated. All of these are key ideas deriving from Bergson's *The Creative Evolution*. In Ratté's view, Adorno was convinced of the fact that music is normatively destined to *become*. In this way, for Adorno, Bergson's theory had a function which established something akin to a *foundation-in-hindsight*, after the experience of a musical work. Adorno argues that

The illusion is that a succession of pure sounds can in reality stand outside time, while what the notes signify in space is nevertheless to be deciphered in temporal sequence, however far the notation may have strayed from measuring time. A succession in time that denies its own progressivity sabotages the obligations of becoming, of process; it fails to motivate why this should follow that and not something else unless it has been determined by what precedes it or conversely, unless it reveals *ex post facto* that what has preceded it was, in reality, its own precondition.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait', in *Quasi una fantasia*, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>269</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' *op. cit.*, p. 275

<sup>270</sup> Michel Ratté, *L'Expressivité de l'oubli*, *op. cit.*, p. 139

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

Adorno thus sees the unfolding of musical time as essential for the creation of form: in other words, form can only be ‘established’ through this motion, rather than being imposed *a priori*. This formal ‘becoming’ (through a ‘bottom-up’ approach to structure and, ultimately, to form) consequently stands in opposition to the reified musical forms of the past; in this way, musical time is not a chronological sequence, but a creative, experiential force. Themes and motifs, developmental technique, and ultimately the interaction of contrasting musical elements are the technical aspects which allow for this experience of transitoriness, as discussed above in relation to the contents of the work of art.

In Adorno’s view, the key to the possibility of the modernist musical artwork lay in precisely this formal ‘becoming.’ As we have seen, he considered the striving for unification as it is manifested in traditional musical artworks to be no longer possible – for two reasons: firstly, because of the destruction of the organicist work-concept in integral serialism; and secondly, because the state of the musical material had become so fragmented that any attempt at unification would create a false, *illusory* image of the world. If artworks were to be possible at all, they had to find a way to redeem the illusion that they ineluctably created: and his concept of *musique informelle* attempts to escape this impasse. However, his theorization of the musical *informel* in this sense has a strongly utopian character, as he evidently did not believe that the kind of modernist musical artwork that he envisaged had yet been attempted. In the next chapter, I will examine this issue in more detail, and discuss some of the most important critiques of Adorno’s concept.

## CHAPTER 2: Towards an Aesthetics of the *informel*





## Introduction

The chapter revisits key elements of Adorno's concept of *musique informelle* in light of Gianmario Borio's critique and theorization of an aesthetic of the *informel*. In turn I will attempt to show how Borio's aesthetics can be employed for a reading-against-the-grain of Adorno's concept – in contrast to historical and hermeneutic readings, for example by Martin Zenck – especially by drawing on the notion of the *sound-object* as well as Walter Benjamin's theories of the *object* and the *dialectical image*. As I have already argued, the concept of *musique informelle* is one of the most important contributions to theorizing the possible/valid modernist artwork in the postwar period. A number of musicologists and composers have engaged with it both theoretically and practically, especially in its supposed utopian aspects.<sup>272</sup> Adorno's text effectively opened new perspectives to theoreticians, including Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, and composers, amongst others, Dieter Schnebel, Aldo Clementi, György Ligeti, and Brian Ferneyhough.<sup>273</sup> The reception of the concept, though diverse and not universally acknowledged – can nonetheless be seen in the composition of new works, and in the implications it could have for theorizations of these contemporary oeuvres, regardless of explicit references to Adorno's concept. A number of authors have analyzed the conception of *musique informelle* from a historical and musical point of view, including Martin Zenck.<sup>274</sup> However, the most important systematic work building on this concept, radically expanding it, both in itself and as constitutive of an aesthetic of the *informel*, is

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<sup>272</sup> For a debate of what utopia means in the work of Benjamin and Adorno, and others, see: <http://www.heathwoodpress.com/somethings-missing-study-dialectic-utopia-theories-theodor-w-adorno-ernst-bloch/>

<sup>273</sup> Max Paddison and Irene Deliège, *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, (Farnham, Ashgate, 2010)

<sup>274</sup> Martin Zenck, 'Auswirkungen einer "musique informelle" auf die neue Musik, zu Theodor W. Adornos Formvorstellung,' in *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1979), pp. 137-165

Gianmario Borio's book *Die musikalische Avantgarde um 1960*.<sup>275</sup> Other works elaborating Adorno's concept of the *informel* include Michel Ratté's book *L'expressivité de l'oubli*<sup>276</sup> and Nels J. Rogers' thesis *Theodor W. Adorno's Poetics of Dissonance*.<sup>277</sup> Their respective methodological approaches can be described as music-historical, music-philosophical and literary-critical. Ratté's book also develops a theory of forgetfulness which builds on elements from *Vers une musique informelle*, while at the same time exploring concepts from Bergson's *The Creative Evolution*. As we have seen, Bergson's work influenced Adorno's concept of time, albeit negatively. Finally, I argue that a complementary explicatory model is possible, if one revisits those aspects of Benjamin's thinking on history (and especially his concept of the dialectical image) which provided a starting point for Adorno's theorizations; and also his theory of the language of objects. Moreover, as I have already mentioned in passing, in certain later writings such as *Aesthetic Theory*, further theorizations on musical time indicate a development in Adorno's thought which can fruitfully expand both Borio's aesthetics and re-conceptualize Adorno's *musique informelle*.

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<sup>275</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993). While Borio's work features in this chapter, his text will later be confronted with other approaches to Adorno's writings.

<sup>276</sup> Michel Ratté, *L'expressivité de l'oubli – Essai sur le sentiment et la forme dans la musique de la modernité*, (Bruxelles, La lettre volée, 1999), p. 18

<sup>277</sup> Nels Rogers, *Theodor W. Adorno's Poetics of Dissonance: Music, Language and Literary Modernism*, (Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania, 2001), p. 327

### Readings of *musique informelle* – affirmation, reaction and interpretation

The importance of *musique informelle* in light of the crisis of the musical work of art can hardly be underestimated. The reception history of the concept in itself presents a plethora of opinions and further theorizations, paradoxically hardening and using the concept as a means to justify specific artistic projects, often mutually irreconcilable. Moreover, a concept of such richness can be misappropriated, as Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf argues in an essay on the music of Brian Ferneyhough,<sup>278</sup> by what he terms ‘conservative, outright reactionary composers,’<sup>279</sup> who would go as far as taking recourse to Adorno’s concept precisely to show how they had known all along that there was something suspicious with integral serial technique. Mahnkopf argues that Adorno’s text is conscious of the ‘irreversible elements in the musical evolution,’ which he sees as very close to the ‘production and aesthetics of Brian Ferneyhough.’<sup>280</sup> Although he is aware of the reductive nature of his speculations to linking a single composer with Adorno’s concept, he claims that Ferneyhough had formed his own aesthetics<sup>281</sup> before he had mastered German well enough to have read Adorno’s work.<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, he seems unaware of some of the problems in Adorno’s conceptualization; on this basis, an interpretation of what the concept should mean

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<sup>278</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, ‘Vers une musique figurelle?’, in *Contrechamps*, No. 8, (1988), pp. 45-63

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 53. See also Brian Ferneyhough, ‘Form, Figure, Style: an Intermediate Assessment (1982),’ in *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, Vol. 19, (1982), pp. 64; reprinted in J. Boros and Richard Toop (eds.), *Brian Ferneyhough. Collected Writings*, (Amsterdam, Harwood Academic, 1995), pp. 26; translated into French by J. Demierre, ‘Forme, Figure, Style – une évaluation intermédiaire,’ in *Contrechamps*, 3, (1984), p. 88

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 53; the passage discussed above includes the following original passage: ‘Il serait naïf – malgré tous le points communs sur le plan du contenu, entre ces deux textes exemplaires – de considérer que l’oeuvre de Ferneyhough, correspondant parfaitement à ces phrases, incarne la ‘musique informelle’ d’Adorno. Il ne s’agit pas de déterminer en quoi l’un est le précurseur direct de l’autre ni de faire une étude comparative entre le ‘cadet’ et son ‘maître’ potentiel. De tels rapprochements seraient tout simplement incompatibles avec des personnalités ayant une manière de penser et de sentir aussi originale, d’autant plus qu’il est biographiquement prouvé que les vues fondamentales de Ferneyhough avaient déjà pris forme lorsqu’il maîtrisa suffisamment l’allemand pour lire Adorno.’

is then used to argue for similarities with Ferneyhough's project. As already stated before, even integral serialist composers such as Pierre Boulez quickly and pragmatically adopted elements of Adorno's concept into their own self-justifying theorizations. However, the problem more generally is not if a certain composer's music adopts elements from Adorno's concept, but how exclusively it claims to do so, to the detriment of all other composers' artistic interpretations.

How, then, is *musique informelle* to be understood? An answer to this question can be found, on the one hand, in a historic interpretation, and on the other hand, a further development into a critical assessment of the *informel*, drawing conclusions of its inherent contradictoriness and utopian blind spots. The former position can be seen in the work of the German musicologist Martin Zenck, the latter in the development of and aesthetic of the *informel* by the Italian musicologist and philosopher Gianmario Borio. Especially Borio's groundbreaking work on the music around 1960 encapsulates both the contradictions and the potential for exploring this contemporary music.

The conceptual inquiry explicated in this dissertation also builds a bridge into the non-conceptual elements in the individual compositions; in other words, as these artworks claim to be more than the sum of their parts, the relation between the overall form (as organized, non-linear temporal unfolding) must be confronted with the spatialized and object-like character of their architecture. In other words, the problem of the conditions of the artwork's possibility and validity in Adorno's perspective requires an inquiry into their temporal unfolding. However, as each composer's compositional technique differs, a first, more general analytic conceptualization is nonetheless necessary. This approach is aimed at confronting the intuitive elements as well as the formal strategies employed in the production of these works. A point of departure in this could be seen in the work of Gianmario Borio into the musical avant-garde, as he situates the postwar avant-garde in terms of opposing compositional strategies – *serialist* versus *informel* (with

reference to Adorno's concept of *musique informelle* and Heinz-Klaus Metzger's notion of an *a-serial* music)<sup>283</sup>. Especially with regard to Feldman's music, he claims that it is important to understand that the latter is not aiming to eliminate 'complexes of meaning' [*Sinnzusammenhänge*]<sup>284</sup> from his scores by using a purely intuitive method or a 'coincidental disposition of the material'.<sup>285</sup> This means that any analytic strategy adopted for these works, must start from the works themselves. Because they are not structured in a traditional way, conforming to the classic 'work' concept, a strategy is needed which brings out this critical aspect.<sup>286</sup> The current approach is therefore not aimed at an exhaustive analysis of a body of compositions as separated from the conceptual considerations outlined above. Their relevance consists precisely in foregrounding their distinct treatment of the passage of time. As such, the analytic methodology refrains from totalizing claims, which would encompass all parameters separately, as is usual in certain forms of traditional analysis. Moreover, in each of the works considered a formal analytic approach is always mediated by the focus on the question of musical

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<sup>283</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', *op. cit.*

<sup>284</sup> Borio's use of 'complexes of meaning/signification' refers to the creation of meaning at the level of the composition, in the first instance related to an extra-musical meaning. In this sense, meaning exists in the work's structure.

<sup>285</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993) 'Wenn man von manchen graphischen Partituren wie *Intersections 3* absieht, erkennt man, daß das Ziel Feldmans keineswegs die abschaffung des Sinnzusammenhangs durch zufällige Disposition des Materials war.'

<sup>286</sup> Gianmario Borio gives an overview of the discussion about the concept of the work [*Werkbegriff*] in *op. cit.*, p. 77ff., especially in relation to the organic form and its history. He argues that in the classical (Viennese) work concept, a piece of music 'with art(istic) character appears as a closed structure, whose parts are related in a functional way; the organic construction of the form guarantees that each element stands in a meaningful relation to the one preceding it and is grounded in the totality of the work [*Werkgesamtheit*]. The classic concept of the artwork also implies an articulation of units of meaning [*Sinneinheiten*] in time, who by the force of a generally valid syntax are attached to one another. The work has a clear opening, a comprehensible progression and a meaningful ending.' See also Carl Dahlhaus, 'Plädoyer für eine romantische Kategorie – Der Begriff des Kunstwerkes in der Neuesten Musik' [1969] and 'Über den Verfall des musikalischen Werkbegriffs' [1971] in Carl Dahlhaus, *Schönberg und andere : gesammelte Aufsätze zur Neuen Musik*, (Mainz, Schott, 1987)

time and space. In that sense, it proved more fruitful to engage with aspects beyond the scope of traditional analysis, such as the placement of the instruments in the concert space, as well as composition-technical aspects.<sup>287</sup> This expansion of the parametric method as such appears necessary. It is here that Benjamin's theory of a language of objects becomes crucial, not only because of the demands of the works themselves but because of the inherent (organicist) bias of traditional analysis. Gianmario Borio's own approach takes Peter Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* as its methodological guideline; Bürger's thesis argues that the crisis of the category of the (organic) work of art<sup>288</sup> demands a new model, in this case the 'informal'<sup>289</sup> work of art.<sup>290</sup> In his view, the

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<sup>287</sup> Analysis of the work of Xenakis, for example, can be seen in the light of his theory of time, in the sense that he allows for an increased rationalization of the compositional *process*. This often includes a number of stages preliminary to a (final) written or printed score, for example the mathematical operations executed on a number of devices including computers and machines of his own design (UPIC). Sometimes a trace of these exists in the form of drawings on (millimeter) paper or computer print-outs. See for example the first part of our paper: Joris De Henau, 'Gmeoorh (1974) for Organ by Iannis Xenakis – Towards a Critique of the Arborescence,' in *Proceedings of the International Symposium 'Iannis Xenakis'* (University of Athens, Greece, May 2005), Athens, 2006.

<sup>288</sup> 'In the organic (symbolic) work of art, the unity of the universal and the particular is posited without mediation; in the non-organic (allegorical) work to which the works of the avant-garde belong, the unity is a mediated one. Here, the element of unity is withdrawn to an infinite distance, as it were. In the extreme case, it is the recipient who creates it. Adorno correctly emphasizes: 'Even when art insists on the greatest degree of dissonance and disharmony, its elements are also those of unity. Without it, they would not even be dissonant.' The avant-gardist work does not negate unity as such (even if the Dadaists had such intentions) but a specific kind of unity, the relationship between part and whole that characterizes the organic work of art.' In Peter Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 56

<sup>289</sup> As to the precise definition of 'informal': this term does not signify a casual nonchalance or purely random approach, but refers to the notion of *musique informelle* as developed by Adorno in his essay with the same name in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia : essays on modern music*, (London ; New York: Verso, 1992). As I have explained above, the term originated in painting as *art informel*. The work of some of its (German) proponents, a.o. Wols, was evidently known to Adorno. See Chapter 1 in this dissertation.

<sup>290</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 76-80; translation in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, (Theory and history of literature, Vol. 4.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 32. Bürger describes how the disintegration of the category of the organic work of art happened in the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century by means of two pairs of both aesthetic and production-technical concepts:

singular sonorous event of the informal work then claims [...] a validity, which goes beyond its rating within the structural or formal context. This could lead to a paradox that the work, whilst fixed in its details, is no longer a finished work. It is not about the temporal unfolding of meaningful elements or the objectification of structures, but about passing moments of an in principle endless process of transformation of the matter.<sup>291</sup>

In the case of the music of Edgard Varèse, one work in particular can be considered as historically crucial in the development of a texture-based compositional praxis: *Intégrales*. The use of what Varèse himself termed *sound masses* is seen in the light of the dodecaphonic and other contemporary compositional systems. Especially Varèse's insistence on the non-totalizing aspect of his structural approach, which develops a number of these sound masses through an open process of *textural* transformations, rather than melodic or thematic variations, will be considered. The inherent spatialized aspect of the composition itself, as acoustic or spatial, rather than a purely linear development, can be seen as the critical treatment of the musical material, towards a new (non-linear) understanding of its temporal unfolding.

Other works which embody the problematic in a particularly pertinent form are Morton Feldman's *In Search of an Orchestration* as well as the music composed for *Words and Music*, a radio play by Samuel Beckett. Feldman's collaboration especially reveals his understanding of the literary form of the allegory, which proved influential in his own musical form-building as well as the temporal, non-linear aspect of the allegory, which I will show as central to the work of Walter Benjamin's analysis of the concept of the allegorical image. This allegorical image was

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the new and the allegory on the one hand, chance and montage on the other hand. It is under influence of montage technique that a new sort of work concept appeared, which stands in opposition to the *organic* work of art. Its false consciousness is criticized by Bürger, who paraphrases Adorno: 'The organic work of art that pretends to be like nature projects an image of the reconciliation of man and nature.' Peter Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, op. cit., p.78

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., p. 80

based on Benjamin's analysis of the seventeenth-century German *Trauerspiel*, or mourning play.<sup>292</sup> Finally, Feldman's *Second String Quartet* and *Why Patterns?* reflect Feldman's preoccupation with memory, temporal unfolding in relation to formbuilding and structuration; he shows how the similarity between different patterns are forced into in the mind's eye to construct forms – however, due to the great length of these works, this formal feeling is undermined and itself shown to be a reifying, spatializing factor.

Additionally, a number of works by Xenakis represent a different aspect of the same dialectic between formalizing strategies and more loose, even intuitive compositional techniques: a number of his electro-acoustic works, as well aspects of works such as *Terretektorh*, *Evryali* and *Duel*<sup>293</sup> will be considered from this perspective. The case for the inclusion of Xenakis's compositions in relation to the apparent antithetic concept of *musique informelle* will be made from the point of view of the temporal organization, as well as the particular treatment of the material. In this regard, the French musicologist Benoît Gibson has shown<sup>294</sup> how the implicit use of self-borrowing and montage in Xenakis's work reveal a new aspect of the notion of the object, as one between element and texture.

The works of the composers investigated here reveal different compositional strategies, from the *informel* in the above sense, to the formalized approach of Xenakis. These approaches, which are more fluid than what meets the eye or the ear at first, rather than an opposition of the

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<sup>292</sup> Please refer to Chapter 3 and 4 for a detailed discussion of the different types of image in Benjamin and their relevance for the aesthetics of the music studied in this thesis.

<sup>293</sup> *Duel* is considered to be conceived as an open form, based on insights drawn from game theory. See Benoît Gibson, *The instrumental music of Iannis Xenakis : theory, practice, self-borrowing* (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2011), p. 15

<sup>294</sup> Benoît Gibson, *The instrumental music of Iannis Xenakis : theory, practice, self-borrowing* (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2011)



intuitive/formalized, this pair is revealed to be *dialectical*. Here, (composing) subject and sound object are not simply a further rationalization of the material into static products (as, according to Adorno, was the case with Wagner's music,<sup>295</sup> or even in the Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*)<sup>296</sup> but a genuine discovery of the object, not only with temporal qualities, but with as an object-in-space as well. A second element in this analytical strategy therefore consists precisely of the micrological aspect: the import of notation, something already pointed out by the musicologist Walter Gieseler:

Notation allows for the release of 'fleeting' musical structures from to the pure temporal unfolding and to make them 'long-lasting;' because of notation the experience of time can become a spatial experience. Notation is an image of a system of musical relations, and allows for the possibility of it to become a developed, highly differentiated and timeless structure.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Adorno argues that Wagner's operas display a tendency to produce 'stage images,' in other words, perfect illusions, of (invisible) music and drama. However, in terms of perception, for Wagner, the eye alone does not suffice. According to Adorno, he is of the opinion that music holds something 'unerfasst,' something which is not completely subsumed under the reifying ratio, while the 'art of the eye' conforms to the world of particular things, the reified world of praxis, and therefore presents itself as twinned to the spirit of technological progress. See *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, GS 12 p. 196

<sup>296</sup> In the same text GS 12, pp. 176-177, Adorno connects the tendencies in Wagner with the music of Debussy and Stravinsky: 'Strawinsky hat die räumlich-flächenhafte Konzeption der Musik von Debussy geradewegs übernommen, und die Technik der Komplexe ebenso wie die Beschaffenheit der melodischen Atommodelle ist Debussystisch. Die Neuerung besteht eigentlich nur darin, daß die Verbindungsdrähte zwischen den Komplexen durchschnitten sind, die Überreste differential-dynamischen Verfahrens abgebaut werden. Hart stehen die räumlichen Teilkomplexe gegeneinander. Die polemische Negation des weichen *laissez vibrer* wird zum Beweis von Kraft gemacht, das Unverbundene, Endprodukt der Dynamik, geschichtet wie Marmorblöcke. Was ineinander tönte, verselbständigt sich als gleichsam anorganischer Akkord. Verräumlichung wird absolut: der Aspekt der Stimmung, in dem alle impressionistische Musik etwas von subjektiver Erlebniszeit festhält, ist beseitigt.' He concludes that the difference is that the threads which usually serve to connect the elements of the musical structure are cut and that the complexes are contrasted harshly. Spatialization becomes absolute, he argues, as the aspect of the intonation, in which all impressionist music held on to something from the subjective experiential time, has now been waylaid.

<sup>297</sup> This quotation is taken from Walter Gieseler's overview and synthesis of the problematics of this period's compositional technique, especially in the chapter on composition and notation: 'Notation ermöglicht es, daß

In their attempts to break the stranglehold of music as in essence purely temporal, the spatial aspect of the score, as well as their spatialized presence in the concert hall, lies at the basis of the new treatment of the musical material. György Ligeti famously formulated this shift from the manipulation of individual parameters to the constitution of textures, whose meaning is no longer determined from the point of view of the composition's fundamental structure.<sup>298</sup>

Whilst under 'structure' [*Struktur*] a more differentiated framework is meant, whose constituent parts are distinguishable, and which as a product of the correlation of this is to be considered, what is meant with 'texture' is a homogenous, less articulated complex in which the constituent elements disappear nearly completely. A structure can be analyzed along the lines of its components; a texture can better be described through global, statistical characteristics.<sup>299</sup>

In this case, analysis can no longer be the 'reconstruction of fundamental structures, to which invariables, recurrences and types of variations can be ascribed or reduced to; it rather works comparatively and searches to expose the construction principles, which constitute the conditions and principles of transformation.'<sup>300</sup> The textural approach also takes into account the construction of the works as textures, from the perspective of the score. The study of electro-acoustic music, for example, requires this approach, as a score is almost always lacking.<sup>301</sup>

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'flüchtige' musikalische Gebilde dem puren Zeitablauf zu entheben und 'dauerhaft' zu machen: durch Notation kann Zeiterfahrung zu räumlicher Erfahrung werden. Notation ist Abbild eines musikalischen Bezugssystems, sie macht dieses als entwickeltes, hochdifferenziertes und zeitunabhängiges Gebilde erst möglich.' Walter Gieseler, *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert : Details, Zusammenhänge* (Celle, Moeck, 1975), p. 175

<sup>298</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 87

<sup>299</sup> György Ligeti, *Wandlungen der musikalischen Form*, in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 7, (1960), pp. 5-15. Cf. footnote 29, as cited by Borio, p. 87

<sup>300</sup> *idem*, p. 87. Borio quotes from György Ligeti, *Wandlungen der musikalischen Form*, *op. cit.*

<sup>301</sup> Exceptions are, amongst others, Stockhausen's early electro-acoustic *Studies*.

Parameters should therefore no longer be considered in isolation, but from a global perspective.<sup>302</sup>

As I have argued, Adorno's essay *Vers une musique informelle* problematizes not only the musical work of art as a (static) category, but also the temporal unfolding *within*:

It may well prove to be the case that serial and post-serial music is founded on quite a different mode of apperception [*Apperception*], in so far as music can be said to be based on apperception at all. In traditional listening the music unfolds from the parts to the whole, in tune with the order of time [*Ordnung der Zeit*] itself. This flow – that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself – has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered.<sup>303</sup>

Building on the above insights, a third element in this analytic strategy confronts the textural aspects of the composition with the conceptual framework of the compositional strategies of the composers. In the case of Feldman, his own methods can shed a light on the actual works, as they often are composition-technical considerations rather than intentional ones – especially as relating to his notion of the *orchestral image*.<sup>304</sup> The same can be said for Xenakis and Varèse,

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<sup>302</sup> Iannis Xenakis famously used stochastic processes in various ways, as well as other mathematical procedures, in the organization of large groups or numbers of tones and sounds. A remarkable example is his composition *Pithoprakta* (1955-1956) for orchestra with its characteristic 'sound clouds,' organized by Xenakis's stochastic method.

<sup>303</sup> Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' in Adorno, T.W., *Quasi una fantasia : essays on modern music*. 1992, London ; New York: Verso. 336 p., p. 271. 'Die serielle und postserielle Musik dürfte auf eine prinzipiell verschiedene Apperzeption angelegt sein, sofern man von Musik überhaupt sagen darf, daß sie auf Apperzeption angelegt ist. Das traditionelle Hören verläuft so, daß die Musik sich, gemäß der Ordnung der Zeit, von den Teilen zum Ganzen her entfaltet. Solche Entfaltung, also das Verhältnis der in der Zeit aufeinander folgenden musikalischen Inhalte zum puren fließenden Zeitverlauf, ist problematisch geworden und stellt sich in der Komposition selbst als zu durchdenkende und zu bemeisternde Aufgabe.' Adorno, GS 16, pp. 494-495

<sup>304</sup> See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of this concept. Feldman applies this as part of his compositional technique, specifically in 'On Time and the Instrumental Factor.'

whose texts, sketches, and drawings can serve as analytic tools for the analysis of their work. In all three cases, the transformation (*transfer*<sup>305</sup> or even *translation*)<sup>306</sup> of notated tones into sounds, is at the centre of their compositional approaches. It is at this stage that the notion of *image* can be seen as the global texture of a composition, not only as a spatial, sonorous entity unfolding in time, but one which questions this subordination of space into the spatialization of time. The *image* takes on a double task: firstly, as a way to interpret the composition from the ground up, consisting of a number of transformations of textures, resulting in an *image-like* appearance, and secondly as a *dialectical image* shedding light on their position in the socio-historical context of the postwar musical avant-garde. Although the appearance of the dialectical image is revelatory in this sense, its critical consequence reveals something about Adorno and Benjamin's aesthetics as well: a critique of a normative aesthetics and philosophy of history which, in the case of Adorno, touches upon the ends of his own dialectics of the artwork.

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<sup>305</sup> The relation between 'graph', score and sound is complex in the case of Xenakis; some authors argue that the (acoustic) realisation of the graph employed by Xenakis does not always correspond precisely to the sound *as such*. See Makis Solomos, *Iannis Xenakis*, (Mercuès, P.O. Editions, 1996), p. 70. Cited in Joris De Henau, *op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>306</sup> Sebastian Claren, *Neither: die Musik Morton Feldmans* (Hofheim, Wolke, 2000), p. 110. Feldman's particular technique focuses on the creation of a succession of timbres, but as Claren says, 'the instruments themselves should disappear in the case of this translation, to achieve a pure, abstract sound, which is Feldman's actual concern.' He also goes into more detail as to the differences in conception of *translation* in the work of Jasper Johns and Morton Feldman. See Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*, p. 326-334. Johns's approach was often referenced by Feldman – who understood *variation* as a form of translation as defined by Johns: 'Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. Etc.' See Jasper Johns, 'Sketchbook Notes,' in *Art and Literature*, Vol. 4, (Spring 1965), p. 185-192; See also Chapter 4 for a discussion of Benjamin's view on translation.

## Adorno's critique of music and painting

The presentation in 1961 in Darmstadt of the concept of *musique informelle* may have seemed strange to the participants, not least since its origin in the language of plastic arts had not previously been theorized. Adorno mentions two representatives of *art informel* only once—Bern(h)ard Schultze<sup>307</sup> (not to be confused with Wols)<sup>308</sup> and Ness<sup>309</sup>—however, in a way that illuminates his choice of this concept. Gianmario Borio contextualizes this reference, by mentioning that Adorno is supposed to have found the idea for *musique informelle* after visiting the *Quadrige* exhibition in Frankfurt in 1952.<sup>310</sup> The references in his work to actual plastic or visual arts are rather scarce. In a central passage from his *On Some Relationships between Music and Painting*,

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<sup>307</sup> Bernhard Schultze was the cofounder of the Frankfurt painters' group *Quadrige*. See: Gerhard Leistner (ed.), *Tanz der Migos. Bernard Schultze 1915–2005*, (Regensburg, 2005); Sabina Schultze (ed.), *Bernard Schultze. Innerer Monolog*, (Cantz, Ostfildern, 2005); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (ed.), *Einblicke. Das 20. Jahrhundert in der Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen*, (Düsseldorf, Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2000); Rolf Wedewer and Lothar Romain (ed.), *Bernard Schultze*, (München, 1991); Theo Rommerskirchen, 'Bernard Schultze,' in *viva signatur sil*, (Remagen, Rolandseck, 2005); Peter Prange, 'Schultze, Bernard,' in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB), vol. 23, (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2007), p. 706

<sup>308</sup> Wols was influenced by Bernhard Schultze. Work illuminating this link as well as his concept of the image include: Gerd Gaiser, *Aktuelle Malerei : von Arp bis Wols* (Munich, Knorr & Hirth, 1963), Ralf Busch and Wols, *Wols – das druckgraphische Werk* (Hamburg, Christians, 2004), Hubert Salden, *Wols' Bildkonzept*, Hans J. Petersen, *Wols: Leben und Werk im Spiegel gewandelter Wahrnehmung* (Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1994). See also Chapter 1 in this thesis.

<sup>309</sup> According to Gianmario Borio, Ness is possibly a mis-spelling of the sculptor Rolf Nesch, because Adorno mentions Nesch in *Ohne Leitbild*, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Ohne Leitbild. Parva aesthetica* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 183

<sup>310</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 90. Borio refers to a book on this exhibition, see: Kurt Winkler, *Neuexpressionisten (Quadrige)*, in Berlinische Galerie, *Stationen der Moderne: die bedeutenden Kunstaussstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, (Berlin, Berlinische Galerie Museum für Modern Kunst, Photographie und Architektur, 1989), p. 416-426. Borio states that it is a widespread problem in current Adorno scholarship to claim that Adorno wrote his *Aesthetic Theory* without recourse to actual artistic production of the postwar period, and ought to be seen as immanently following his philosophical position. He states that in case of *informel* painting, Bernhard Schultze noted the presence of Adorno at the opening of *Galerie 22* in 1957; cfr. *Informel. Symposium Informel 8-12 October 1982*, (Saarbrücken, Moderne Galerie des Saarländischen Museums, 1983), p. 233

however, Adorno criticizes once again – as before in *Philosophy of New Music* – the ‘pseudomorphosis of music and painting’, especially in relation to time:

Today’s turn makes the tendency’s emancipation from that ‘as if.’ It has been driven to [the point] where literal convergence arrives at the limits not only of the individual arts, but of art as something antithetical to reality. Time is not spatialized into geometric coexistence, but rather—precisely as time—planned, disposed of, organized from the top down *as a whole*, as only visual surfaces once were. Equivalent to the large-scale procedure that so disposes, that treats time like a cartoon, there is a no less painterly procedure on a small scale. It expresses itself most clearly in electronics, but can also be observed in the realm of music that makes use of more or less traditional methods of sound production.<sup>311</sup>

He continues with a critique of the use of tones as if they were colours on the palette of a painter, and the implication of this ‘atomization’ to the demands of (traditional) musical time.

Composers are operating with individual tones the way painters operate with individual colour values; although as a rule the tones may no longer be separated from each other, like dots, but may be more densely layered, still they represent almost the entirety of the composition. The integration of total planning and the atomization into tones correspond.<sup>312</sup>

The result of this atomization is that what Adorno terms the ‘unit of construction’ is reduced to the relation between these individual tones. This form of composition is characterized by its homophony and block-like ordering.

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<sup>311</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei,’ (Die Kunst und die Künste. Anmerkungen zur Zeit, Vol. 12) (Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1967); ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,’ translated by Susan Gillespie, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 66-79

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

The concept of [the] line is not applicable to it, any more than it knows true polyphony; in its place, the sounds, in their simultaneity, have become extraordinarily nuanced and differentiated in themselves, exploiting discoveries made by the early Stravinsky, among others.<sup>313</sup>

It is at this point that Adorno reveals his understanding of this sort of music as going against ‘developmental’ music, and he hastens to mention the composers of the Second Viennese School in this regard:

That which can be seen in traditional music, including Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, to apply specifically to the temporal dimension – the entire art of development and thematic transition – becomes irrelevant to the composers; at best, tone progressions in the sense of the newly available series still retain something of that art.<sup>314</sup>

Adorno refers in the above passage both to the ‘punctual’ serial music of the early fifties, but at the same time, he notes that the new medium of electronic music may preserve some aspect of the idea of a musical line or phrase. Not only is this an indication of Adorno’s limited knowledge of electroacoustic music, it is more importantly an indication of the problem of a new aesthetic theory. Adorno later recognizes this as the ‘alienation phenomenon,’ or the disappearance of the boundaries between the arts.<sup>315</sup> This new work of art, according to Borio, would neither be a re-edition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,<sup>316</sup> nor an idealist conception of a meta-aesthetics of all arts.

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<sup>313</sup> ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,’ translated by Susan Gillespie, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 68

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p. 68

<sup>315</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 91

<sup>316</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting,’ *op. cit.*, p. 74: ‘The Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its derivatives were the dream of that convergence [of space and time] as abstract utopia, before the media themselves permitted it. It failed by mixing media, instead of making the transition from each to the other by way of its own extremity.’

The loss of boundaries is to be explained both as a large-scale projection of a critique of the harmonized work concept, which has been finished by the montage of the historical avant-garde. The arts strive beyond themselves; their constructs want to be ‘objects amongst objects.’<sup>317</sup>

Benjamin’s theory of a language of objects becomes crucial with regard to Adorno’s aesthetics – namely the idea that the objects in question stem implicitly from a theory Benjamin had developed. This theory of a language of objects, as distinct from human language, allows for a communication of objects with each other, in a silent, non-linguistic fashion. The immanence of meaning within this language of objects is not subjective, in the sense that linguistic language is. This idea of ‘objects amongst objects’ in terms of the artwork strive indeed beyond their subjective moment of creation, a critical instance of emancipation from a totally subjective understanding of artworks as exclusively intentioned and dominated by the artist’s will. Adorno questions the supposed link between the artist’s intention and the autonomy of the work of art in his aesthetics. The harmonized work in this regard, is criticized from the historical position of the avant-garde (Adorno refers to the montage technique as the main agent) in its pursuit of the open work, amongst others. This operation seems to tie in the idea of the *informel* as critical of the traditional, harmonized work concept with its concurrent striving beyond a self-enclosed, monadological core. This is obviously a reference to the idea of the mediation of the artwork and its socio-historical content; however, as *constructs* these same artworks strike up a communication with other objects, in order to achieve and communicate their objective truth content as objects-amongst-objects. The interpretation of this message, finally, is the task of the philosopher, as Walter Benjamin argues.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op.cit.*, p. 91. ‘Die Entgrenzungen werden gleichsam als Projektion in große Dimensionen einer Kritik am harmonizistischen Werkbegriff gedeutet, die sich mit der Montage der historischen Avantgarden im Werk vollzogen hatte. Die Künste streben über sichselbst hinaus; ihre Gebilde wollen ‘*Dinge unter Dinge*’ werden.’

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Chapter 3 and 4 for a detailed analysis of the concept of the object and the language of objects in the work of Walter Benjamin and its relevance for the discussion in this thesis.



### Critique of a concept?

Borio suspects that in this argumentative dichotomy, Adorno's applies a form of *nostalgia* to pre-avant-garde criteria of the artwork, a contradiction which ultimately held him back from developing a complete theory of form of *musique informelle*. Borio refers in this context beyond Adorno's own conception, but at the same time he still regards it as preferable to theories of the *open* work, especially as formulated by the Italian semiologist Umberto Eco.<sup>319</sup> The open work, defined as created through the reception, disavows the work concept and situates it radically as subjective; this position often conceives of the work as consisting of *static* objects, which can only generate movement through the interpretative act of listening to the transitions between structural elements. The underlying concept is one of music-as-process.<sup>320</sup> As Borio argues, the merit in Eco's conception lies in the recognition of the changed role of the perceiver (as reader, or listener, etc.), who is no longer bound to a singular reading of a work of art, but takes an active role in a never-ending process of explanation (*performing*, as it were, the role of an architect whose construction continuously reveals new sides).

Eco's conception of the open work is, however, problematic in two senses, especially with regard to his consideration of music. Firstly, he restricts 'informel' music to the variable forms of Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio and Pousseur<sup>321</sup> and, secondly, he fails to argue his case from the

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<sup>319</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 89

<sup>320</sup> See for example Karlheinz Essl's short paper on this topic: <http://www.essl.at/bibliogr/klangkomp.html> As he points out, this conception of the work-as-process was theorised by Konrad Boehmer, 'Werk - Form - Prozeß' in Ulrich Dibelius (ed.), *Musik auf der Flucht vor sich selbst*, (Munich, 1969)

<sup>321</sup> In terms of Pousseur's electroacoustic music and its supposed open form, see John Dack, 'The Electroacoustic Music of Henri Pousseur and the "Open" Form,' in Björn Heile (ed.), *The Modernist Legacy. Essays on New Music*, (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009), pp. 177-190

point of view of the immanence of the work.<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, Eco extracts his analytic criteria from the artist's intentions, and from the *reception* of the open work. His definition of the open work falls short in the sense that it understands and explains the *informel* work as an epistemological metaphor, whilst naming precisely those cognitive categories – such as causality, *tertium non datur*, identity – which fail to describe the *informel* structures; at the same time, he reduces the formation of the work to an additive combination of set pieces with multiple meanings. According to Borio, it is only by reconstructing the compositional approaches and reflecting on the changes of artistic technique that an objective foundation of an informal aesthetics can be discovered, which Eco's *open work* remains closed to.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> From my experience as a member of the audience at the live broadcast of a meeting between Umberto Eco, Luciano Berio and Henri Pousseur during the 'Eco in Fabula' – project, in the Aula Pieter De Somer, Leuven, Belgium (24-27 February 1999), what remains a distinct memory is the apprehensive state of both Eco and Berio as to the legacy of both the *concept* of the open work and its interpretation in terms of at least its *musical* aspect. Eco repudiated its openness with regards to the multiplicity of possible readings of the works in question, Berio defended his own approach in rather strong but uneven terms, whilst Pousseur simply seemed to rejoice in presenting his own work (his opera *Votre Faust* uses pages with cut-out windows) to the moderator Jean-Pierre Rondas and the gathered audience. See Franco Musarra, Bart Van den Bossche, Koenraad Du Pont, Natalie Dupré, Rosario Gennaro, Serge Vanvolsem, *Eco in Fabula. Umberto Eco in the Humanities. Umberto Eco dans les sciences humaines. Umberto Eco nelle scienze umane. Proceedings of the International Conference, Leuven (Belgium) 24-27 February 1999*, (Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2002)

<sup>323</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 89

### Borio's Critique of Adorno's concepts of *musique informelle* and musical material

In his chapter on Adorno's concept of *musique informelle*, Gianmario Borio opens his account by citing the historical polemic against the constructivist tendencies of integral serialist composition, in the context of the Darmstadt *Ferienkurse* to which Adorno had returned. By following on from arguments in earlier texts, especially *The Ageing of the New Music*,<sup>324</sup> Borio argues that Adorno's text reveals a more positive attitude towards the avant-garde composers, in a turn towards even the utopian. In principle, this attitude can be explained as a new position taken up by Adorno, following Heinz-Klaus Metzger's response to *The Ageing*, after a closer study of compositions such as Pierre Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* (1955)<sup>325</sup> and his *Third Piano Sonata* (1955-57),<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Das Altern der neuen Musik,' a speech given by Adorno in April 1954 at the Süddeutsche Rundfunk. The text was published in 1955 in the periodical 'Der Monat,' Vol. 7 (1955), and later in an extended version in the first edition of *Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt* (Göttingen, 1956), and can be found in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 143-167. See Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 102

<sup>325</sup> Since its creation, the bibliography concerning *Le marteau sans maître* has grown considerably and whilst discussing various aspects, however, works devoted to the *temporal* organization and architecture include: Steven D. Winick, 'Symmetry and Pitch-Duration Associations in Boulez' *Le Marteau sans maître*,' in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 280-321; Jésus Aguila, 'Boulez: Vingt regards sur une page du Marteau sans maître,' in *Analyse Musicale*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2001), pp. 77-94; François Decarsin, 'L'organisation du temps en musique sur l'axe passé/futur,' In *Les universaux en musique: Actes du quatrième congrès international sur la signification musicale*, edited by Costin Miereanu, Xavier Hascher, and Michel Guiomar, (Serie Esthétique), (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), pp. 589-97; Wolfgang G. Fink, '"Schönes Gebäude und die Vorahnung": Zur Morphologie des 5. Satzes von Pierre Boulez' *Le marteau sans maître*,' in *Pierre Boulez II, Musik-Konzepte*, 96, edited by Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1997), pp. 3-61

<sup>326</sup> Works discussing the formal and temporal organization of Boulez's *Third Piano Sonata* include Pascal Decroupet, 'Floating Hierarchies: Organisation and Composition in Works by Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen during the 1950s,' in *A Handbook to Twentieth-Century Musical Sketches*, edited by Patricia Hall and Friedemann Sallis, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 146-60; William G. Harbinson, 'Performer Indeterminacy and Boulez's Third Sonata,' in *Tempo* (New Series), Vol. 169 (June 1989), p. 16-20. Allen B. Ruch, 'Pierre Boulez: Third Piano Sonata, Répons: Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)', 2004 [http://www.themodernword.com/joyce/music/boulez\\_sonata.html](http://www.themodernword.com/joyce/music/boulez_sonata.html) [consulted on 05 January 2011]: '[The] desire to free the music from the "tyranny of the composer" would become more evident in Boulez's later works, and would inform the entire spirit and structure of his *Third Piano Sonata*. But rather than working towards

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Zeitmaße* (1955-56)<sup>327</sup> and *Gruppen* (1955-57)<sup>328</sup> and his article on musical time *...how time passes ...*,<sup>329</sup> as well as John Cage's *Piano Concert*. Crucially, Borio claims that other motives may have played a role: theoretically, the notion – which he only formulated later in *Aesthetic Theory* – of the work of art's *unconscious historiography* [*unbewußte Geschichtsschreibung*],<sup>330</sup> which reveals certain connections, which cannot simply be uncovered by a empirical or purely philosophical approaches. A second motive was Adorno's observation of the increased reception of his *Philosophy of New Music*, which had introduced the concepts of musical material,

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increased freedom, for the next few years Boulez tightened the reins on his music, pursuing increasing levels of serialization: not only would pitch be regulated to mathematical formulae, but other dimensions such as rhythm, duration, intensity, and so on would also be subject to control. Despite Boulez's claims to the contrary, this was not a completely original idea -- Messiaen had tried and abandoned it, and Milton Babbitt had been independently working on a similar concept in America -- but Boulez's mania for organization, complexity, and large-scale works set him aside from his like-minded contemporaries.'

<sup>327</sup> Concerning the organization of Stockhausen's *Zeitmaße*, see Pascal Decroupet, 'Gravitationsfeld Gruppen: Zur Verschränkung der Werke Gesang der Jünglinge, Gruppen und Zeitmaße und deren Auswirkung auf Stockhausens Musikdenken in der zweiten Hälfte der fünfziger Jahre,' in *Musiktheorie* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1997), pp. 37–51; Pascal Decroupet, 'Une genèse, une œuvre, une pensée musicale ... en mouvement Zeitmaße de Karlheinz Stockhausen,' in *Revue Belge de Musicologie*, Vol. 52 (1998), pp. 347–361; François Nicolas, 'Comment passer le temps ... selon Stockhausen' in *Analyse Musicale*, Vol. 6 (January 1987), pp. 44–55; Henri Pousseur, 'Zeitmasse: série, périodicité, individuation,' in *Musiques croisées*, with a preface by Jean-Yves Bosseur, (Collection Musique et musicologie), (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 171–189; Dieter Schnebel, 'Karlheinz Stockhausen,' in *Die Reihe*, 4 ("Young Composers"), 1958 [English edition 1960, 121–35]. The section 'Zeitmaße oder Geschwindigkeit als Aspekt der Zeit' is reprinted in Dieter Schnebel, *Denkbare Musik: Schriften 1952–1972*, edited by Hans Rudolf Zeller, (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972), pp. 230–235

<sup>328</sup> Similarly, see Imke Misch, 'On the Serial Shaping of Stockhausen's *Gruppen für drei Orchester*,' translated by Dr. Frank Hentschel and Jerome Kohl, in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 1998), p. 143–187; Imke Misch, *Zur Kompositionstechnik Karlheinz Stockhausens Gruppen für 3 Orchester (1955–57)*, (*Signale aus Köln: Beiträge zur Musik der Zeit*, 2), edited by Christoph von Blumröder, (Saarbrücken, Pfau, 1999); Roger Smalley, 'Stockhausen's *Gruppen*,' in *Musical Times*, Vol. 108, No. 1495 (September 1967), p. 794–797

<sup>329</sup> Karlheinz Stockhausen, '... wie die Zeit vergeht ...,' in *Texte zur Musik*, vol. 1, (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1963), p. 99–139. A different version of the text was first published in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 3, (1957), pp. 13–42. The translation into English was by Cornelius Cardew, as '... How Time Passes ...' and published in the English edition of *Die Reihe*, Vol. 3, (1959), pp. 10–40

<sup>330</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (GS, Vol. 7), Frankfurt 1970, p. 272 and 286

compositional subject, the language character of music and spatialization – and a new phase in the musical avant-garde. In his understanding, this required a new theory – of *musique informelle*. Borio points out that this concept is arguably confusing, as the link with the visual artistic roots of the concept are hardly theorized, and two of the artists are mentioned only once. What is more important for Adorno, according to Borio, is the overcoming [*Überwindung*] of the organic work of art by the integral serial conception of the artwork, as well as the status of the work concept after this radical shift. However, Borio finds that Adorno's argumentation can be criticized in two ways. Firstly, the conception of an '*informel*' musical work of art, that 'the constructivist negation of the organic conceives of itself, is abolished, and develops a new formal feeling, mostly using the categories of motivic-thematic music, which obscure rather than affirm Adorno's intuition.'<sup>331</sup> Secondly, in his critique of serial and aleatoric music, Adorno refers 'all too often to old critical points of view. The reduction of the serial conception of the work to the idea of the mechanical is problematic.'<sup>332</sup> For Borio it is the assumption of an analogy between aleatoric and serial outcomes, which is difficult to prove today,<sup>333</sup> that 'prevents Adorno from really recognizing the birth of sound-oriented *musique informelle* in the interaction between the two aesthetic perspectives.'<sup>334</sup>

In Borio's view, it was especially Adorno's concept of musical material which seems to oppose any further development of his own concept of *musique informelle*: although he suggests that the material is subjected to historical changes, Adorno suspects that the use of unusual sounds

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<sup>331</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 140

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Martin Zenck, on the other hand, quotes Ligeti, who famously said that: 'Principally, there is no difference between automatic results and products of chance: the totally determined becomes identical with the indetermined.' In Martin Zenck, *op cit*, p.148; Adorno also referred to this in his *Aesthetic Theory*, without naming Ligeti.

<sup>334</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 104

(including what was once considered mere *noise*) constitutes a return to the ‘physical qualities of nature’<sup>335</sup> of the sound, towards a pure enjoyment of alluring sounds, which relieves the composer from building meaningful constructs. In this sense, Borio laments the fact that Adorno scuppers the potential of an aesthetics of musical time, in which the objects no longer obey the traditional logic – generally speaking, as motivic-thematic thinking, often regarded to be central to compositional technique.<sup>336</sup> Borio stops short of accusing Adorno of failing to recognize the real progressive element in *musique informelle*:

In this way Adorno missed the possibility to conceive of the relation between musical time and sound objects that differ from the motivic-thematic thinking and bring the physical qualities of the sound into account. This would have resulted in a relaxation of the request for stringency in the musical logic: categories which – as the relation between [musical] substances, developing variation, contrasting derivation – regulate the musical course of the ‘organic’ work, would have receded in favour of principles of meaningful combinations of more complex sound objects. The logic of the informal work could also be guided by criteria which distance themselves from the language character and orientate themselves according to the disposition of the heterogeneous [musical] objects in space.<sup>337</sup>

No matter how flawed from the present perspective, for Borio, ‘in the generality of the music-theoretical formulation, Adorno has, however, not overlooked the instances that long for a

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> See also Max Paddison for a similar argument: ‘This could be seen as the ideological aspect of Adorno’s aesthetics of music: the approach itself, which elevates fragmentation to the status of a structural principle, a ‘law of form’, also serves to conceal inconsistencies in the general logic of its own argument. [...] the suspicion persists that, in spite of Adorno’s espousing of the fragment as critique of totalising systems, underlying his own work there is, nevertheless, an allegiance to totality and organic unity which derives from German idealist philosophy and from the emphasis on motivic-thematic integration in the tradition of Austro-Germanic instrumental music.’ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 264

<sup>337</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 153

transformation of musical logic.<sup>338</sup> This is explicitly not a *logic* in the general understanding of the term, as Adorno explains in *Vers une musique informelle*:

Concepts like logic and even causality, which the passion for order necessarily avails itself of, but which even the concept of *musique informelle* cannot entirely dispense with, do not literally operate in works of art, but only in a modified way. To the extent in which works of art share some of the features of reality, logic and causality also intervene, but only in the way in which they function in dreams.<sup>339</sup>

Gianmario Borio sees Adorno's *musique informelle* from a historical perspective, as a concept which tries to go beyond the aporias of serial music. The informal in *musique informelle* can in this sense be regarded as a *terminus negativus* in the development of musical form. However, this does not refer to a completely form-free kind of music, but one that has freed itself from the generalities of heteronomous musical laws. One of these aporias is the contradiction between general laws of structure building and recognizable connections. It is consequently not surprising that Adorno opens his essay by considering the problems of listening and questions pertaining to musical time, as we have already seen:

It may well prove to be the case that serial and post-serial music is founded on a quite different mode of apperception [*Apperception*], in so far as music can be said to be based on apperception at all. In traditional listening the music unfolds from parts to the whole, in tune with the flow of time itself. This flow - that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself - has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' English transl. p. 293, original p. 515. Borio also refers to Ligeti *Apparitions* as an example of the use of just such a type of dream-logic or *pseudo-causality*. Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 105

<sup>340</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' English translation page 271, original German p. 494-495

At the beginning of the 1960s, Adorno sees the problem of giving form to musical time as one of the unsolved tasks of music composition. Stockhausen developed a theory of musical time, which defines the pitches as *functions* of time, which claims to be founded in physics. However, Adorno criticizes the merging of pitch and time in this regard.

The objective time-factor in all parameters and the living experiential time of the phenomenon are by no means identical. Duration and pitch belong to different musical realms, even if in acoustics they come under the same heading [sic]. In the controversy on this point the concept is used equivocally. It covers both *temps espace* and *temps durée*, physically measurable, quasi-spatial time and experiential time. Bergson's insight into their incompatibility cannot be erased.<sup>341</sup>

In other words, the distinction between experienced and clock time as offered by Bergson remains crucial. Morton Feldman in particular would oppose Stockhausen's view rather vehemently; to him sound already incorporates a duration. As Borio argues,

Musical time is not something that can be structured by means of abstract principles but coincides with the real time of sounds. This conception of temporality criticizes the traditional musical logic; it is now about letting sounds ring out to let them exist in a quasi natural situation. The negation of structure, however, does not carry with it the anarchist traits of the most famous negation of musical meaning by [John] Cage<sup>342</sup>

Borio's interpretation attempts to overcome the impasse of Adorno's fear for a fetishization of sound as raw *Stoff*<sup>343</sup> (see *infra*) by proposing a new notion, which does not seem to immediately

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 271

<sup>342</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avant-garde um 1960*, *op. cit.*, p 153

<sup>343</sup> Musical material is, however, a dialectical concept that continued to change throughout his writings and cannot readily be seen as isolated from other categories. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno repeats the notion that the material is not a natural reality, but historically preformed: 'Material is not natural material (*Naturstoff*), even when it is presented [to or by] the artists as such, but historical through and through.' Carl Dahlhaus, amongst others, has criticized what he understands as the 'reduction of the "natural given" to the "pre-musical" physical substance of music, because the relation between the natural and historical characteristics results in a dialectic of



totally dominate its material content, but at the same time includes some necessary conditions for the creation of form. This he terms *sound object*: '[Feldman] pursues rather the formulation of a decentralized and asymmetrical logic, which liberates the sounds from any pre-determined system, whilst a configuration of time should rise from the *sound object* itself.'<sup>344</sup> He finally pleads for a new analytic strategy – as other methods have proven ineffective – which ought to prove that this transformation of the function of musical time can clarify how meaning is construed in Feldman's piano works, through criteria derived from the works themselves:

The fact that the change in how musical time functions does not automatically signify the destruction of all musical logic, could be proven by the analytic efforts which try to illuminate – whilst other methods having become useless – the creation of meaning in Feldman's piano works through work-immanent criteria.<sup>345</sup>

An example of such a work is Feldman's *Extensions 3*

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material, which Adorno seems to ignore with this reduction of the material as historical only.' See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Adornos Begriff des musikalischen Materials,' in Carl Dahlhaus, GS 8 (Laaber, Laaber Verlag, 2005), p. 278

<sup>344</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, 153

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. 'In seinen leisen Klavierminiaturen verfolgte er vielmehr die Formulierung einer dezentralisierten und asymmetrischen Logik, die die Klänge von jedem vorgeordneten System befreit, wobei eine Konfiguration der Zeit aus dem Klangobjekt selbst entspringen soll. Daß die Umfunktionalisierung der musikalischen Zeit nicht automatisch Vernichtung jeglicher musikalischen Logik bedeutet, können analytische Bemühungen beweisen, die – bei der Unbrauchbarkeit anderer Methoden – die Sinngestaltung in den Feldmanschen Klavierwerken durch werkimmanenten Kriterien zu klären versuchen.'

## Extensions 3

Morton Feldman  
(1952)

Soft as possible, ♩. = 52

The musical score for Morton Feldman's 'Extensions 3' (1952), page 8, is presented in five systems of staves. The tempo is marked 'Soft as possible' and the time signature is 5/4. The score includes measures 1 through 17. The notation features various musical symbols including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Measure 1: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 2: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 3: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 4: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 5: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 6: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 7: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 8: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 9: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 10: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 11: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 12: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 13: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 14: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 15: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 16: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Measure 17: Treble clef: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). Bass clef: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).

Figure 5: Morton Feldman, Extensions 3 (1962), p. 8

In the above example, *Extensions 3* (1952), Feldman brings together the dimensions of space and time in a novel way. The music does not develop, but progresses in a stepwise manner; it ‘spreads across’ space.<sup>346</sup> In terms of register, the music is played in the four upper octaves of the piano, *pianissimo*. The two major sevenths at the beginning do not express ‘tension’, requiring a resolution, as Borio argues; instead, they ‘frame a sonorous space, containing the first notes, as well as the range (of a major seventh), which remains constant by the regular change of tone pairs.’<sup>347</sup> Feldman avoids giving the impression of completing the chromatic total, which in a sense would create another harmonic *tendency*, with a potential for new patterns of expectation. This is achieved by repeating a note enharmonically (g $\sharp$  = a $\flat$ ) in b. 4. Rhythmically, this section seems to have gradually longer durations. In bar 8 Feldman changes the temporal construction, not by changing the meter (which stays constant), but by the repetition of the major ninth e $\flat$  - f. The unfolding of time which was based on homorhythmic two-note chords, is now redefined by short ostinatos. In such a thin texture this change comes across as a slowing down of the temporal flow. The following pause which lasts for 3 bars could be seen as a quasi-rhetorical device in such a concentrated composition; it functions however neither as a syntactic punctuation, nor as a bridge in a continuous chronological process. In his analysis, Borio refers to the concept of *blankspace* [*Leerstelle*],<sup>348</sup> ‘a gap which enters a productive moment of uncertainty in the listening process.’<sup>349</sup> This moment produces a new mode of time:

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<sup>346</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 155

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 155: ‘Mit einem Begriff Wolfgang Iser’s kann man sie als ‘*Leerstelle*’ definieren – eine Leerstelle, die ein produktives Unsicherheitsmoment in den Hörprozeß einführt. Durch sie wird ein neuer Modus der Zeit hergestellt: die leere empirische Zeit wird mittels Rückbeziehung auf die vorhergehende ereignishafte Zeitgestaltung zu Erlebniszeit, *temps durée*, umgedeutet. Chronologische Zeit erhält hier das Gewicht gestalteter Zeit; die Pause bildet die Extremform des Kontrastes, einen weder preiodischen noch aperiodischen Zeitverlauf.’ He attributes this to Wolfgang Iser. See Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 155

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

the empty empirical time becomes experienced time, *temps durée*, by means of the retroactive relationship with the previous temporal arrangement. Chronological time contains here the weight of arranged time; the pause builds the extreme form of a contrast, a neither periodic nor aperiodic course of time.<sup>350</sup>

Although the texture of the opening bars returns later in the piece, Borio refutes that this reveals a circularity in the form, within what he argues constitutes a

fragmented work concept. Fast, syncopated rhythms, and “*as loud as possible*” clusters break off, releasing the hitherto retained energy – in spring-like eruptions, that are unwound in respectively sound aggregates and splinters. The four last measures seal the composition by fusing repetitive patterns and vertical aggregates, made more complex with appoggiaturas.<sup>351</sup>

The clusters he mentions, to be played as loud as possible appear near the very end of the piece, in bars 127 and 131. For a moment it seems as if there might be a climactic resolution, as in a coda or finale, but the piece concludes on a quiet, solitary c.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 158

The musical score consists of six systems of piano music, each with a treble and bass staff. Measure numbers 117, 121, 125, 129, 133, and 137 are placed at the beginning of their respective systems. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. '8va' (eightva) is used to indicate notes an octave higher than written, and '8ba' (eightba) indicates notes an octave lower. 'X' marks are placed above or below notes to indicate a fortissimo (as loud as possible) dynamic. The score shows a progression of complex textures and dynamics across the measures.

X = as loud as possible

Figure 6: Morton Feldman, Extensions 3, p. 13

Borio concludes his analytical remarks with the statement that this work – which was seen as a precursor to the work of *minimal music* composers – distinguishes itself from the latter precisely in the conception of musical time, as well as in the character of the respective patterns.<sup>352</sup> These patterns, as in later works, are usually short and disparate in their relationship to one another. The music does not move through gradual changes from an opening pattern (which remains through all of its transformations essentially the same); instead Feldman's music consists of 'rhapsodic transitions of one state of sound [*Klangzustand*] – which is at the same time the definition of temporal mode – to another.'<sup>353</sup> Moreover, time does not move in a continual fashion as in

the gradual process, of Steve Reich and Terry Riley; it is broken and fragmented, by which the gaps and the motionlessness (in which the continually progressive movement and filling-up of minimal music is expunged) build nerve points of the musical logic.<sup>354</sup>

In other words, Feldman's music is not generated from a hierarchically designed plan or starting position, but it approaches compositional technique from the standpoint of the a-directional, multi-perspectival work concept.<sup>355</sup> This concept contrasts the work of the *minimal* composers, whose concept of time reduces the 'temporal multiverse' to the 'one-dimensionality of onwards-flowing time.'<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 158

<sup>354</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p.158

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 159

### *Musique informelle* – (in)formal considerations

Rather than presenting a *fundamental* critique of Borio's aesthetic of the *informel*, I propose a further development of this theory, expanding it into the music not taken into consideration by Borio. As we have already seen, certain aspects of Adorno's essay *Vers une musique informelle* would allow for such an approach, including the overture to the art of the painters of not only the 'movement' identified rather speculatively by Tapié, but, crucially, by drawing on the work of Adorno's friend Walter Benjamin. In order to achieve such further theorizations of the aesthetic of the *informel*, the important critique of serialism should figure in any further conceptualization of this sort. However, as has already been hinted at, such work was done in terms of compositional technique by composers such as Edgard Varèse and Iannis Xenakis. In one sense such an expansion of the aesthetics of the *(in)formel* is at work long before any of the composers already named in this thesis; influences Adorno would have considered central to his own aesthetics. Although it would go too far to consider here all of these music-historical elements which informed Adorno's work, the (spatializing) tendency towards the treatment of musical material in the nineteenth century, would suggest that to be meaningful in music required that the composer should connect the individual elements, such as motifs and themes, in a fashion which could be perceived as *interrelated*, and this ought to be borne out by the overall form of the work. The extent of this formal unfolding, generally seen as a *developmental* structuring of musical material, was historically expounded by the music critic and champion of the music of Johannes Brahms, Eduard Hanslick, whose *The Beautiful in Music (Vom musikalisch-Schönen)*<sup>357</sup> considers music as 'socially moving forms,' whose meaning is purely musical. In this discourse, themes and melodies form the core of the subject of music. However, Adorno's aesthetics of music, despite being extraordinarily influenced by these ideas, also considered its dialectical opposite, in the

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<sup>357</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854) (Leipzig, 1902, 10<sup>th</sup> edition)

music of Richard Wagner,<sup>358</sup> whose *Leitmotif* technique seemed to attempt to break down the barriers between the musical and the extra-musical, by identifying a motif with a certain object, for example the Rhine gold in the Ring of the Nibelung. This critique of Wagner's music has a history of its own, not only since Nietzsche's critique of Wagner,<sup>359</sup> but also in the work of Walter Benjamin – which is much less well-known. In his book *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*,<sup>360</sup> the scholar Lutz Koepnik argues in this regard for an understanding of the impact of Wagner's work in contemporary aesthetic and political terms; Benjamin's evaluation 'of the fascist spectacle clearly borrows from Nietzsche's critique of Wagner,'<sup>361</sup> and it 'foreshadows in rudimentary form Adorno's much more extensive thoughts in *In Search of Wagner*, written in 1937/38 and published as a book in 1952.'<sup>362</sup> According to Koepnik, Nietzsche criticized particularly 'Wagner's dictatorial modes of compositional address causing the erosion of aesthetic form.'<sup>363</sup> In the process of trying to convert his audiences, Wagner 'also sacrifices artistic authenticity to become a cultural institution of renewal.'<sup>364</sup> Nietzsche argued that Wagner's 'megalomaniac visions of power' force the composer to 'dictate the ways according to which his works ought to be understood,' whilst at the same time he treats 'his compositional material with violence and, hence, in an unaesthetic fashion.'<sup>365</sup> Crucially, both Nietzsche and Adorno find fault with Wagner's inscription of political imperatives 'right into the centre of his

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<sup>358</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin, Suhrkamp, 1952); GS 13 (1971), pp. 7-148; translated by Rodney Livingstone, *In Search of Wagner*, (London, NLB, 1981)

<sup>359</sup> Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives. Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999)

<sup>360</sup> Lutz Koepnik, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*, (Modern German Culture and literature), (Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1999)

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, p. 102

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.



works' – which, according to Koepnik, destroys 'their aesthetic integrity.'<sup>366</sup> Whilst appealing 'to the listener's emotions,' Wagner 'denies autonomous forms of sense perception, and negates the individual body'<sup>367</sup> as a site of desire and spontaneity.<sup>368</sup>

Whether or not actively trying to avoid the totalizing aspect of Wagner's designs, however, *modernist* composers such as Arnold Schoenberg attempted to combine aspects of the technical procedures of both these tendencies in music – resulting in a new atonal language, and a technique termed *developing variation* as well as new formal procedures. The post-war musical avant-garde insisted on taking this formal speculation even further. In this regard, Borio suggests that Adorno's intertwining of temporal articulation and the creation of a new concept of musical form shows a possible link between his concept of *musique informelle* and mobile, variable forms, like Stockhausen's concept of *infinite form*.<sup>369</sup> Borio describes how this form concept, which Stockhausen had already worked out around 1960, is to be seen as an answer to the question of how to build complexes of meaning, in which specific moments with common characteristics can follow one another, without losing their individual profile (this is also called *Momentform*). In Adorno's essay, this touching upon Stockhausen's *Momentform* was rather *en passant*. However, in other texts, including *Skoteinos*,<sup>370</sup> and *Negative Dialectics* Adorno criticizes this position implicitly:

Absolutized duration, pure becoming, the pure act – these would recoil into the same timelessness which Bergson chides in metaphysics since Plato and Aristotle. He did not mind that the thing he

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> See, famously, Jean-Jacques Nattiez's argument in *Wagner Androgyne*, translated by Stewart Spencer (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014)

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 103

<sup>369</sup> See Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Momentform: Neue Beziehungen zwischen Aufführungsdauer, Werkdauer und Moment," in his *Texte zur Musik*, Vol. 1, (Cologne, Dumont, 1963), pp. 189-210. *Infinite form* or *Momentform* was established with the composition of *Kontakte* (1958-1960).

<sup>370</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel. Aspekte. Erfahrungsgehalt. Skoteinos oder wie zu Lesen Sei*, GS 5, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1963)

reached for, if it is to remain a mirage, is visible solely with the equipment of cognition, by reflection upon its own means, and that it grows arbitrary in procedure and related, from the start to that of cognition.<sup>371</sup>

The German-Dutch composer Konrad Boehmer, who wrote both on Adorno's concept of musical material<sup>372</sup> and a timely and contemporary book on open form,<sup>373</sup> theorized open form as a disintegration of the work, and speaks rather in terms of *processes*. Others, like the German musicologist Walter Gieseler, criticize this opposition between work and process; he argues that in this sense, a "work" is always "in progress." In this way temporally determined processes and 'timeless' works (in the memory of the listener) are two sides of the same coin.<sup>374</sup> For Gieseler, moreover, this idea of process – defined as the dynamic sequence of different states of a thing [object] or system – can have two aspects: determined, and stochastic processes. The former is characterized by one state distinctly resulting from the previous one, the latter by proceeding with a certain degree of probability.

In that sense, a work is a determined process (however, not in a totalized sense); and so an open or ambiguous form can be described as stochastic (or statistical). However, the view is also possible, that

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<sup>371</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 9. 'Die zum Absoluten erhobene Dauer, das reine Werden, der *actus purus*, schließe um in die gleiche Zeitlosigkeit, die Bergson an der Metaphysik seit Platon und Aristoteles tadelt. Ihn bekümmerte nicht, daß, wonach er tastet, soll es nicht Fata Morgana bleiben, einzig mit dem Instrumentarium der Erkenntnis, durch Reflexion ihrer eigenen Mittel, zu visieren wäre und zur Willkür ausartet in einem Verfahren, das von vornherein unvermittelt ist zu dem der Erkenntnis.'

<sup>372</sup> Konrad Boehmer, 'Der Korrepetitor am Werk – Probleme des Materialbegriffs bei Adorno,' in *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie* 4 (1973), pp. 28-33

<sup>373</sup> Konrad Boehmer, *Zur Theorie der offenen Form in der neuen Musik*, (Darmstadt, Edition Tonos, 1967) (Second edition 1988)

<sup>374</sup> Walter Gieseler: 'Auch was nicht 'Werk' ist, kann Form haben, daß heißt zur sinnlich anschaulichen Erscheinung gelangen: So kann also der musikalische Prozeß Form haben. Schließlich wird der Zusammenhang des Werkes, sein für das Hören schlüssiger Aufbau erst im musikalischen Prozeß, im Ablauf des Ganzen erfahrbahr. Insofern ist 'work' immer 'in progress.' Somit sind zeitabhängiger Prozeß und 'zeitloses' Werk (etwa in der Erinnerung des Hörers) zwei Seiten *einer Sache*.' Walter Gieseler, *Komposition im 20. Jahrhundert : Details, Zusammenhänge*, *op. cit.*, p. 147

processes are always stochastic. Then the determined process would be, formulated in extreme [terms], a borderline case of stochastic processes; the dialectic unity of necessity and chance leans in this case, however, to the side of necessity.<sup>375</sup>

Although Gieseler is concerned with various types of open forms, he states that process and work can't be simply opposed *politically*:

After such considerations it might no longer be easy to call indeterminate musical *processes* democratic because of the relaxed regulation and rule, [as it is] to defame musical 'works,' however, as signs of a conservative-reactionary mindset. A work is just not a repeatable static 'thing,' but a repeatable, more or less determined process.<sup>376</sup>

Another avenue of further reasoning can be found in the work of Martin Zenck. In a return to the issue of form, Martin Zenck sees Ligeti's writings<sup>377</sup> as rather close in spirit to Adorno's ideas. Both authors namely emphasize the importance of imagination in the constitution of musical form, which in their eyes reflects the disentanglement of serial and aleatoric compositional methods:

One question is hard to avoid in this 'freer' phase of serial composition: when the determination through series have been shifted to more global categories of form and individual moments are made up of vague elements why then still serial manipulations? Could one not leave form, both in its global sequence as well as in all its details, to unrestrained imagination? The ideal of *musique informelle* is based on the temporal character of music, although not in the mundane sense, that music, in order to be

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<sup>375</sup> Walter Gieseler, p. 147: 'Demnach ist ein Werk ein determinierter Prozeß (allerdings nicht im totalen Sinne), offene oder mehrdeutige Form läßt sich dann als stochastisch (oder statistisch) beschreiben. Doch ist auch die Ansicht möglich, daß Prozesse immer stochastisch sind. Dann wäre, im Extrem formuliert, der determinierte Prozeß Grenzfall stochastischer Prozesse; die dialektische Einheit von Notwendigkeit und Zufall neigt sich in diesem Falle aber zur Seite der Notwendigkeit.'

<sup>376</sup> Walter Gieseler, *op. cit.*, p. 147: 'Nach solchen Überlegungen dürfte es nicht mehr leicht angehen, indetermierte musikalische Prozesse, da ihnen Bestimmung und Herrschaft abgebaut seien, als demokratisch zu bezeichnen, Musik-'Werke' aber als Zeichen konservativ-reaktionärer Geisteshaltung zu diffamieren. Ein Werk ist eben nicht ein wiederholbares starres 'Ding' sondern ein wiederholbarer mehr oder weniger determinierter Prozeß.'

<sup>377</sup> György Ligeti, 'Wandlungen der musikalischen Form,' in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 7, (1960), p. 4

alive, has to occur in time, but in the sense that the compositional task, according to Adorno remains 'how to reconcile temporal form and musical content.'<sup>378</sup>

Zenck states that both Ligeti and Adorno base what he terms their *imaginative approach* on Schoenberg's notion of feeling for form [*Formgefühl*].<sup>379</sup> Borio refers in this case to an interesting round table discussion at the Darmstadt Summer course in 1960 (in the same year as the publication on form,<sup>380</sup> in which both Adorno and Ligeti, as well as a number of other composers and musicologists wrote). It seems that Adorno fully agreed with Ligeti's thesis,<sup>381</sup> that it is not so much about the alternative between serial and aleatoric, but the loss of the 'vector-character', a direction-constant of the composition. From the philosophical conception of music as a temporal art form Adorno infers the conviction that music is principally incompatible with spatial conceptions at odds with this temporal demand; for example, no musical event can be indifferent or contrary to the movement of time. In this sense, the conception of *musique informelle* as a music 'with possibly many relations' functions as an implicit critique of forms, lacking this direction of development that attempt to defeat Bergson's concept of *temps durée* or experienced time through 'focusing on the [here and] now', attempting to

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> In a later article, 'Form in der neuen Musik,' in *Darmstadter Beiträge zur neuen Musik*, Vol. 10, Ligeti commented on Adorno's essay and indicated its influence on his work.

<sup>380</sup> György Ligeti, 'Wandlungen der musikalischen Form,' *op. cit.*

<sup>381</sup> The mutual understanding of Ligeti and Adorno on the relation between determination and indetermination (chance), also bears on what Adorno calls the 'illusory character' [*Scheincharakter*, cfr. Negative Dialectics] of music. Adorno translates the compositional issue of the interchangeability of chance and blind integration in the convergence of contingency and necessity, which achieve in their extreme the point of indifference of their 'lack of the illusory' [*Scheinlosigkeit*]. Adorno criticizes this 'lack of the illusory': 'Adorno kritisiert diese "Scheinlosigkeit" als Schein, da Kunst den ästhetischen Schein nicht abzuwerfen vermag und der ästhetische als Teil des logischen Scheins den Schein als Anschein und Täuschung in der realen Welt nicht abschaffen kann.' In other words, Adorno criticizes the loss of critical capabilities through aleatoric techniques, for when art/music resolves the illusion, when it doesn't pose itself the illusion-problem [*Scheinproblem*], she loses the possibility to reflection [*Widerschein*] einer besseren Welt zu werden. Art only obtains this possibility, the 'Metexis [taking part of things in ideas] to truth', when it absorbs the logical 'illusion' and fights it as an opponent.

overcome ‘timelessness.’<sup>382</sup> However, the sort of position as reflected by Stockhausen (in Borio’s opinion), is increasingly being challenged. As argued by Christine Eichel in this regard, ‘a philosophy of art which equally searches for ideal-typical isolated protagonists to verify general reflections, is challengeable in a time in which the artists themselves do not recognize the borders of their genres.’<sup>383</sup>

Adorno’s *musique informelle* did not correspond with actual existing music. Gianmario Borio claims that no later compositions have fully put themselves the task to resemble or fulfill these principles. In my view, it is, however, possible to speak of tendencies that refer implicitly or latently to the contents of the essay. Paradoxically, the core of composers named in the essay, Boulez, Stockhausen and Cage, are the ones who have taken up the challenge of an informal music.

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<sup>382</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 108

<sup>383</sup> Christine Eichel, *Vom Ermatten der Avantgarde zur Vernetzung der Künste: Perspektiven einer Interdisziplinären Ästhetik im Spätwerk Theodor W. Adornos*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1993)

### *Musique informelle* as an alternative modernist music

Composers who were outsiders in the 1950s, and whose works would gain increasing importance – like György Ligeti, Dieter Schnebel, Mauricio Kagel, and Franco Evangelisti<sup>384</sup> – were receptive to several aspects of Adorno's aesthetic. For example, Franco Evangelisti published a text of Adorno's on technique, technology and contemporary music in the series he edited with others titled *Ordini-Studi Sulla Nuova Musica*.<sup>385</sup> As Borio suggests, what is relevant here is not the precision or the textual faithfulness of this reception, but the independent development of kernels that were laid out in the theory. One could make an overview of compositions and the degree of relatedness to the concept of *musique informelle*. Several composers have named works with informal in the title, such as Aldo Clementi's *Informel* cycle<sup>386</sup> and the group of other composers from Rome, including the above-mentioned Franco Evangelisti, and Domenico

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<sup>384</sup> Franco Evangelisti (1925-1980). See: Christine Anderson, *Komponieren zwischen Reihe, Aleatorik und Improvisation: Franco Evangelisti's Suche nach einer neuen Klangwelt*, (Hofheim, Wolke, 2013); Franco Evangelisti, Heinz-Klaus Metzger, Rainer Riehn, Giacinto Scelsi, Dieter Schnebel, and Claudio Annibaldi. 1985. *Franco Evangelisti. Musik-Konzepte* Vol. 43/44, edited by Heinz-Klaus Metzger und Rainer Riehn, (Munich, Text + Kritik, 1985). The composers mentioned here do not constitute an exclusive list. In this regard, Borio observes a certain continuity between the work of Evangelisti and that of Salvatore Sciarrino, for example in the latter's *Berceuse* (1969). See Gianmario Borio, *Der italienische Komponist Salvatore Sciarrino*, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 152, No. 5, (1991), pp. 35 and Gianmario Borio, 'Franco Evangelisti a Darmstadt, contro e dopo Darmstadt,' in Friedrich Hommel and Wilhelm Schlüter (eds.), *Logica e poesia. Darmstadt ieri e oggi. Testi - Immagini - Omaggi*, (Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt, 1989)

<sup>385</sup> See Bernard Rands, *Reports from Rome and Paris*, in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 101, No. 1405 (March 1960), p. 174. The other composers involved in this publication were Domenico Guàccero, Egisto Macchi and Antonino Titone.

<sup>386</sup> Aldo Clementi (1925-2011), *Informel n.1* for percussion and keyboard; *Informel 2* (1962) for 15 performers; *Informel 3* (1961–63) for orchestra, (Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 1964). See *Liste Internationale Sélective* No. 22 (octobre 1964), in *Fontes Artis Musicae*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (September-December 1964), p. 186, Graziella Seminara, and Maria Rosa De Luca (eds.), *Canoni, figure, carillons: itinerari della musica di Aldo Clementi: atti dell'incontro di studi, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, Catania, 30–31 maggio 2005*, (Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 2008)

Guàccero,<sup>387</sup> Giacinto Scelsi<sup>388</sup> and Mario Bertoncini; York Hoeller's<sup>389</sup> *Sonate Informelle* also falls within this sphere.

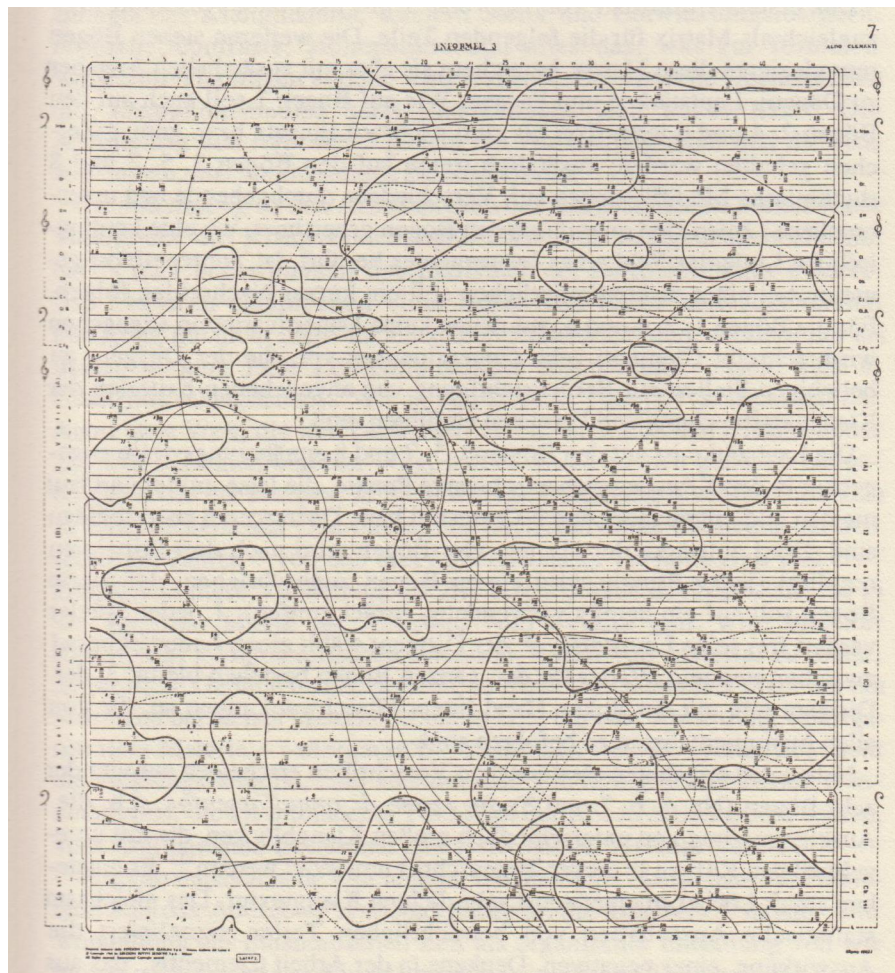


Figure 7: Aldo Clementi, *Informel 3* (1961-1963), p. 7

<sup>387</sup> Domenico Guàccero, 'L'"alea," da suono a segno grafico,' in *La Rassegna Musicale*, Vol. 31 (1962); Guàccero also co-produced radio programmes on electroacoustic music with Pietro Giomi in Milan. See Francesco Giomi, 'The Work of Italian Artist Pietro Grossi: From Early Electronic Music to Computer Art music,' in *Leonardo*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995), p. 37

<sup>388</sup> For a study of Giacinto Scelsi in this context, see Gianmario Borio, 'Klang als Prozeß. Die Komponisten um *Nuova Consonanza*,' in Klaus Angermann (ed.) *Giacinto Scelsi Im Innern des Tons*, (Wolke, Hofheim, 1993), pp. 11-25. English translation as 'Sound as Process: Scelsi and the Composers of *Nuova Consonanza*,' in Franco Sciannameo (ed.), *Music as Dream: Essays on Giacinto Scelsi*, (Lanham, Maryland, Scarerow Press, 2013)

<sup>389</sup> York Hoeller, (1944-). See Rainer Nonnenmann, *York Höller*, in *Komponisten der Gegenwart*, Hans-Werner Heister and Walter-Wolfgang Sperrer (eds.), (Munich, 2005)

Evangelisti and Bertoncini, for example, founded an improvisation collective called *Nuova Consonanza*,<sup>390</sup> where they produced music using forms of distortions and oscillations of sounds from different instruments or new sounds sources. Scelsi explored the micro-level of individual tones. In contrast, Clementi – who was also a trained painter – worked with extensive chromatic textures, which are set in motion by means of a dense counterpoint. In one interview, with regard to the origins of the *Informel* pieces, Clementi explicitly refers to ‘the *textures* of Fautrier, Tapiès and Pollock,’ as well as the ‘*informel continuum*.’<sup>391</sup> One of the most typical sonorities are clusters on the harmonium, obtained through use of a tool that presses down a large number of keys, while at the same time the player can modify the tessitura, location, dynamic and timbre of the cluster. This sonority is characteristic for the whole *Informel* cycle. Ligeti’s own works that are seen in the light of the *informel* are *Aventures* and *Nouvelles aventures* (1962-65), as well *Apparitions* (1958-59)<sup>392</sup> and *Atmosphères*.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Gianmario Borio, ‘Klang als Prozeß,’ *op. cit.*

<sup>391</sup> Renzo Cresti: Come sono nati gli *Informels*? Aldo Clementi: ‘La mia ricerca veramente personale inizia con gli *Informels*. /.../ Conoscevo i quadri di Fautrier, Tapiès, Pollock e le *texture* di Dorazio, Tobey, l’idea di un *continuum* informale mi affascinava. I contrappunti che facevo nascere sulla carta a quadretti erano figure, immagini, configurazioni sonore. /.../ Il *continuum* non doveva essere solo una girandola, ma doveva avere anche un carattere di permanenza, come se i suoni ristagnassero. In *Informel 1* considerai i punti su carta bianca come una vera costellazione senza suoni definiti. In *Informel 2* adoperai un contrappunto attorno a un *cluster*. In *Informel 3* il *cluster* diventò fitto. /.../ Le costellazioni sottoposte a rotazione cambiavano continuamente fisionomia, questa era l’idea di Calder per i suoi *mobiles*, un oggetto sempre uguale ma che cambia muovendosi.’ See Renzo Cresti, *Intervista ad Aldo Clementi*, in *Piano time*, No. 89-89, (July-August 1990). See also Renzo Cresti, *Aldo Clementi*, (Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 1990)

<sup>392</sup> György Ligeti, *Apparitions* (1958/59) for Orchestra, (Vienna, Universal Edition, 1971)

<sup>393</sup> For an early study of these works by Ligeti, see Erkki Salmenhaara, *Das musikalische Material und seine Behandlung in den Werken Apparitions, Atmosphères, Aventures und Requiem von György Ligeti*, (Acta Musicologica Fennica, 2), (Helsinki, Suomen Musikkiteollinen Seura, 1969). For the score of *Atmosphères*, see György Ligeti, *Atmosphères* (Vienna, Universal Edition, 1961)



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Figure 8: György Ligeti, *Atmosphères* (1961), p. 8

For Ligeti himself, a certain ‘unconscious’ response to an ‘aesthetic problem which was in the air’ seem to have taken place; Ligeti argues, in relation to the music of Friedrich Cerha that when they showed each other their current works, scores of *Apparitions* and *Fasce* respectively, how ‘amazed and enthusiastic’ they both felt; rather interesting in light of what Ligeti described as happening

Through the extreme ramifications of polyphonic structures and a kind of pulverization of musical development which the Darmstadt School went in for, there was a total flattening out of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features. A way out was offered by the concept of “static sound-spaces,” in which rhythmic progression is replaced by a very gradual internal transformation of the musical texture: instead of music as a form of movement, music as a state of being.<sup>394</sup>

Ligeti, whilst describing the static essence of this type of music, still refers to it, paradoxically perhaps, as the development (with Cerha) of the concept of a musical continuum. In other words, whilst textures change internally, they do so rather slowly. He explains that this type of thinking was not limited to himself and Cerha, but included Scelsi, whose orchestral work *4 Pezzi su una nota sola*, starts out ‘from almost the same stylistic and aesthetic assumptions.’<sup>395</sup> In this context, Hans Rudolf Zeller implicitly noted the work’s origins in Scelsi’s personal experience of his time in a Swiss sanatorium, where he occupied himself by playing a single note on the piano for a number of hours every day.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> György Ligeti and Inge Goodwin, ‘A Viennese Exponent of Understatement: Personal Reflections on Friedrich Cerha,’ in *Tempo*, New Series, No. 161/162, ...An Austrian Quodlibet... (June - Sep., 1987), p. 5

<sup>395</sup> Ligeti, *op. cit.*, p. 5

<sup>396</sup> Hans Rudolf Zeller, ‘Scelsi’s Tonsystematik im Kontext der mikrotonalen Musik,’ in Giacinto Scelsi, *Im Innern des Tons*, (Hofheim, Wolke, 1993), p. 10. As cited by Hellmut Federhofer, ‘Das neue an der Neuen Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts,’ in *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft*, Vol. 47 (1999), p. 406-407: ‘[Zeller] berichtet, daß Scelsi mehrere Jahre in einer Schweizerischen Klinik verbrachte. Dort saß er “am Klavier und spielte stundenlang den gleichen Ton,” was er für eine gute Therapie hielt. – Wer denkt in diesem Zusammenhang nicht an Franz Grillparzers Erzählung *Der arme Spielmann*: “Ein leiser, aber bestimmt gegriffener Ton schwoll bis zur Heftigkeit, senkte sich,



Figure 9 shows two pages of the musical score for György Ligeti's *Apparitions* (1964), pages 2 and 3. The score is written for a large ensemble, including strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The notation is complex, featuring many dynamic markings (ppp, f, etc.) and performance instructions. The right page includes a table of fingerings for the strings.

**String Fingering Table (Right Page):**

Violins I	Violins II	Violas	Celli	Double Basses
5	7	4	3	4
8	16	8	8	8

**Footnote:**

\* = Shakes pizzicato. Solo mit zwei Fingern anheben und gegen das Griffbrett schnellen lassen. / \* = Strong pizzicato. Raise the string with two fingers and let it rebound against the fingerboard.

1) handboard  
2) left hand  
3) only 16'  
4) bowed

Figure 9: György Ligeti, *Apparitions* (1964), p. 2 and 3

verklang, um gleich darauf wieder bis zum lautesten Gellen emporzusteigen, und zwa immer derselbe Ton mit einer Art genußreichem Daraufberuhen wiederholt.”

Borio's thesis considers the crisis of the work from the perspective of form; he argues that the *informel* doesn't actually mean a renunciation of the formal, but 'it points rather to a cognitive arrangement which firmly recognizes designated [traditional] forms as inadequate and demands a re-conceptualization of form.'<sup>397</sup> At the same time, Borio warns for pure speculation in terms of the criterion of the type of art, which even in its striving towards freedom from formal restrictions and the instantaneity of gesture,<sup>398</sup> still obeys Adorno's thesis of aesthetic nominalism.<sup>399</sup> In the case of painting, this refers to the 'disappearance of the hierarchy of the complete composition in a continuum of brush strokes.'<sup>400</sup> He states that 'the categories extracted from the original context must be rethought with the help of the specific premises of compositional labour.'<sup>401</sup> Apart from the gestures of an *informel* composition being communicated in the score, a second fundamental idea should be considered, in order to *direct* the gestures of the interpreters:

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<sup>397</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 87: 'Sie weist vielmehr auf eine geistige Disposition hin, die fest umrissene Formen als inadäquat erkennt und nach einer Neubestimmung des Formbegriffes verlangt.'

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>399</sup> According to Borio, Adorno's argumentation reveals the central problem of modernist art in an unsurpassable fashion, and considers the historical avant-garde, whilst mistrusting the *informel* as another form of false consciousness: see Borio p. 86. He refers to a passage from Adorno's aesthetic theory, where he mentions action painting, art informel and aleatorical composition. *Ästhetische Theorie*, GS Vol. 7, p. 329. See above for a discussion of this same passage.

<sup>400</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 86: 'Das stünde dem Kunstanspruch und der Ausdrucksqualität dieser Gebilde schroff entgegen. Informelle Kunst nimmt dort an dem von Adorno formulierten, nicht zu Ende gedachten 'ästhetischen Nominalismus' teil, wo sie die Hierarchie der ganzheitlichen Komposition in ein Kontinuum der Malspuren auflöst.'

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86: 'Die aus ihrem ursprünglichen Zusammenhang herausgelösten Kategorien müssen anhand der spezifischen Prämissen kompositorischer Arbeit überdacht werden.'

Likewise the fundamental idea of the *informel* of the mobility in music is conceivable only under conditions specific to genre. Mobility can refer to the exchangeability of the parts of open form or to the flexibility of the components of a complex sonorous structure.<sup>402</sup>

It is here that Borio points to the confluence of the projects of *art informel* and *musique informelle*, the central point in his thesis:

Nevertheless, at a [certain] point the coincidence of the *informel* in painting and music can be determined more sharply: in the separation of the structure by the texture. [...] the sequence of sound textures of [such] a composition cannot be explained by reference to fundamental structures; it points the observer always to the *internal constitution of the textures* [my stress] on account of which the relations “homogeneity”, “differentiation”, “contrast” and “compression” attain new meanings.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. 87: ‘Ebenfalls ist die für das Informelle grundlegende Idee der Mobilität in der Musik nur unter gattungsspezifischen Voraussetzungen denkbar. Mobilität kann sich auf die Vertauschbarkeit der Teile einer offenen Form oder auf die Beweglichkeit der Bestandteile einer komplexen Klangbildung beziehen.’

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p. 87: ‘An einem Punkt läßt sich jedoch die Koinzidenz der informellen Projekte von Malerei und Musik schärfer bestimmen: in der Ablösung der Struktur durch die Textur. [...] Der Verlauf einer Komposition mit Klangtexturen kann nicht durch Verweis auf zugrundeliegende Strukturen erklärt werden; er weist den Betrachter stets auf die innere Konstitution der Texturen zurück, aufgrund derer die Beziehungen ‘Homogenität’, ‘Differenzierung’, ‘Kontrast’ und ‘Verdichtung’ neue Bedeutung gewinnen.’

### Dieter Schnebel's *Glossolalie*<sup>404</sup>

One composer in particular seems to have prefigured some of the aspects of the concept of *musique informelle* – the aforementioned Dieter Schnebel.<sup>405</sup> In his analysis of Schnebel's *Glossolalie* (1959-1960), Gianmario Borio stresses the importance of the score's notation: instead of a traditionally notated score, Schnebel developed a catalogue of materials, or 'preparations of materials'<sup>406</sup> [*Materialpreparationen*]. For Schnebel *musique informelle* in turn refers to 'an explosion of musical structure' [*Zersprengung der musikalischen Struktur*] and 'liberation of horizontally directed energies' [*Freisetzung von horizontal gerichteten Energien*]. For Schnebel, *musique informelle* 'allows music to become [...] what is material: the shifting material which is realized as constantly renewing shapes.'<sup>407</sup> This work is revelatory as it focuses on the antithesis of discursive and musical language, in recognition of Adorno's essay on the relationship between music and language.<sup>408</sup> As Borio points out, this also forms an important tenet in the *musique informelle* essay itself.<sup>409</sup> The crucial element Borio does not mention is the *implicit reference* in this text to the work of Walter Benjamin, specifically his work on the language of objects, as mentioned before. Schnebel also plays on the idea of the word as sign, as an *historical* image, a trace of a barely readable layer of

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<sup>404</sup> Dieter Schnebel, *Glossolalie*, (Mainz, Schott, 1961)

<sup>405</sup> Dieter Schnebel (°1930); His writings were published as Dieter Schnebel, *Denkbare Musik: Schriften 1952–1972*, edited by Hans Rudolf Zeller, (Cologne, M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972); Gianmario Borio, 'Schnebel's Weg vom seriellen Denken zur informellen Musik,' in Werner Grünzweig, Gesine Schröder und Martin Supper (eds.), *Schnebel 60*, (Hofheim, Wolke, 1990), pp. 22-43

<sup>406</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 88

<sup>407</sup> Dieter Schnebel, 'Komposition von Sprache – sprachliche Gestaltung der Musik in Adornos Werk,' in *Denkbare Musik, Schriften 1952-1972*, ed. by Hans Rudolf Zeller, (Cologne, DuMont, 1972), p. 469. Cited by Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 115: *musique informelle* 'läßt Musik zu dem werden, was sie materiell ist: schwingender Stoff, der sich in ständig neuen Gebilden verwirklicht.'

<sup>408</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Musik, Sprache und ihr Verhältnis im gegenwärtigen Komponieren,' in *Jahresring 56/57* (Stuttgart, 1956); GS 16 (1978), pp. 649-664; translated by Susan H. Gillespie, 'Music, Language, and Composition,' in *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 401-414; republished in Richard Leppert, *Essays on Music. Theodor W. Adorno*, pp. 113-126

<sup>409</sup> Gianmario Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 115





Based on his reading of the work of Ernst Bloch,<sup>410</sup> Schnebel sees the problem of the *informel* not as a problem of *form*, but as a one of *matter* [*Materie*]; in this sense, he argues, Bloch's idea is a representation of matter, which as an *energetic substance* creates its own forms.<sup>411</sup> Firstly, Bloch's conception of form is directed against a naturalistic materialism, which propounds a mechanical movement of this matter, and secondly, it is directed against the deterministic presentation of matter as unmoving substratum of the world. Matter is thus economically and socially conceived as historical matter [*Geschichtsstoff*].

## Conclusion

This chapter set out to contrast the divergent readings of Adorno's *musique informelle* without being exhaustive. These readings include historical perspectives, including Martin Zenck's, and philosophical perspectives. However, these readings can be seen to find form as an aesthetic of the *informel* in the work of Gianmario Borio. He pleads for a re-conceptualization of *form*, drawing on his new perspective of *texture* and the sound object, as well as a renewed understanding of Adorno's concept, itself based on this critical reading. In the following chapters, I will expand this aesthetics into the domain of musical *time* by drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, as well as on Adorno's own writings.

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<sup>410</sup> For a comprehensive English language study of Ernst Bloch's philosophy of music, see Benjamin M. Korstvedt, *Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch's Musical Philosophy*, (Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010); for a study on the relationship between Bloch's and Adorno's thought, see Wolfgang Gramer, 'Musikalische Utopie: Ein Gespräch zwischen Adornos und Blochs Denken,' in *Bloch Almanach*, Vol. 4 (1984), pp. 175-189

<sup>411</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 115



### **CHAPTER 3: Historical Time, Musical Temporality, and the Dialectical Image**



## Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the problem of musical time, more precisely with the treatment of the relationship between time unfolding in musical works and historical time. In the twentieth century, philosophers have been interested in the question of time; after presenting a brief overview of this body of work, we will focus on the questions Benjamin and Adorno saw themselves presented with. In their view, the principal question is concerned with the way in which *traces* of historical processes – in the form of the material conditions – are embedded in everyday objects, including buildings, advertisements, as well as artworks, and how this historical and social residue can be revealed. For Benjamin, the prime object of study was Paris, which he termed the *capital* of the nineteenth century.<sup>412</sup> This was also the locus of one of the most important methodological ‘disputes’ between Benjamin and Adorno concerning their respective conceptions of truth and the subject-object dialectic.<sup>413</sup> In this regard, Richard Wolin argues that

Like Hegel, Benjamin seeks unselfishly to surrender the movement of thought to the inner logic of the object under investigation, in order thereby to permit its essence to emerge unscarred by the prejudices of method. Unlike Hegel, however, whose dialectic advances through the subjective category of mediation, Benjamin’s conception of truth seeks to approximate the idea of ‘theological immediacy’ whereby things are called by their proper names and thus redeemed.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Several important works of Benjamin refer to this central idea of Paris. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999); ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp. 32-49; and ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-92

<sup>413</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,”’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 pp. 50-67; ‘Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,”’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, pp. 99-115 and ‘Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on “The Flâneur” Section of “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,”’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, pp. 200-214

<sup>414</sup> Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin, an Aesthetic of Redemption*, (Weimar and Now, Vol. 7), (Berkeley, Calif.; London, University of California Press, 1994), p. 163

Benjamin subsequently applied this theological conception to the work of art, leading to criticism from Adorno about the lack of mediation in his method.<sup>415</sup> However, when faced with musical artworks, the issue of musical time is inseparable from this material context and cannot be understood outside it: from Adorno's perspective, artworks are not just fashionable or superficial illusions, but mediate in their own way historical time. This crucial insight led Adorno to argue that *valid* artworks have a truth content in that they say something objectively true about the historical time they supposedly mediate. In order to read these works as *objects*, a number of related questions can be asked and positions established. Firstly, what precisely constitutes such an object, and how can works of art, including musical ones, be seen as historically and socially mediated, whilst having a *time* of their own? Secondly, the problem posed by the apperception of these objects requires a new conceptual approach, in an important measure referring to Freud's theory of the *dream* image. Thirdly, the question can be asked as to how this constitutes a critique of the conceptual rigidity of earlier philosophies – the way in which philosophy functions as a language of concepts and conceptualizations – and how this made Benjamin search for an alternative philosophical approach. Finally, it is by proposing this *reading-through-images*, or the involuntary creation of moments of insight (or 'illumination' in the 'Now-time' as Benjamin terms it) which brings a new perspective on the dialectical image in terms of the modernist musical work of art. As I will argue, based on what Benjamin and Adorno named the dialectical image, this conception of the image does not achieve an exhaustive depiction of an object consciously informed by the traditional historical method, but one which allows for both the reader and the object to maintain their separate qualitative make-ups, without being wholly subsumed in the process of this reading, or of being read.

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p. 163

The dialectical image as proposed by Benjamin was critically received by Adorno: on the one hand he had serious reservations (about its utopian and dream-image elements in particular), whilst on the other hand he employed it in his own work. These issues are outlined and discussed in the work of Susan Buck-Morss in her *Dialectics of Seeing*,<sup>416</sup> Shierry Weber-Nicholson's *Exact Imagination*,<sup>417</sup> Margaret Cohen's *Profane Illumination*<sup>418</sup> and Anselm Haverkamp's essay *Notes on the Dialectical Image*.<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, Rainer Rochlitz has considered the implications for the artwork in general.<sup>420</sup> However, this body of work on Benjamin's theories has not been extended to consider music, despite Benjamin's theories having considerable implications for the conceptualization of the musical material. On the other hand, Gianmario Borio's critique of Adorno's *musique informelle* was still working with an older understanding of Adorno's aesthetics—in part based on his critique of Bergson's dual concept of time. I propose an approach which applies these new insights to the study of the avant-garde musical artwork. However, the dialectical image can only be presented through examples rather than definitions<sup>421</sup>—otherwise it would regress into yet another concept with absolute roots. The importance of this alternative to the concepts and conceptualizations as critiqued is to set up

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<sup>416</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing, Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London, the MIT Press, 1989)

<sup>417</sup> Shierry Weber-Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work, On Adorno's Aesthetics*, (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought) (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1997)

<sup>418</sup> Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination, Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Weimar and Now, Vol. 5), (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993)

<sup>419</sup> Anselm Haverkamp, 'Notes on the "dialectical Image" (How Deconstructive is it?)', in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22, No. 3/4 Commemorating Walter Benjamin (Autumn-Winter, 1992), p. 69-80

<sup>420</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *Le désenchantement de l'art. La philosophie de Walter Benjamin*, (Nrf Essais), (Paris, Gallimard, 1992); translated as *The Disenchantment of Art. The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, (New York, Guilford Press, 1996)

<sup>421</sup> This argument of 'either/or' (definitions/examples) is itself not mutually exclusive; the interpretation of definitions can obviously change over time. As I argue, however, the notion of the dialectical image itself has undergone a number of transformations. I will show how from its origins in the study of Paris in the nineteenth century Benjamin, and Adorno subsequently, developed the dialectical image into a much wider reading strategy, especially as it is concerned with (musical) works of art.

what Benjamin calls a ‘third locus,’ which mediates between concepts and material objects in the world. The image as a *tertium datur* never breaks the link with real objects, including the notion of *sound objects* (as I will argue in Chapter 4).

If we understand – with these authors – how Benjamin philosophy of historical time is mediated in Adorno’s understanding of musical time, the idea of a *universal* unfolding – *per* the traditional understanding of musical temporality – itself becomes problematic. The sense that music is solely an art-in-time, then, must be reconsidered. This leads to an understanding of music and musical temporality as increasingly *spatial*. This view – problematic to Adorno – can be reconceptualized by drawing on Benjamin’s work, especially through his reading of works of art as *dialectical* images. These images avoid both the traditional conceptualization of works of art as static objects, and the case of music as simple temporal unfoldings. The dialectics of subject and object at work in the contemplation of a work of art come to a standstill in the sense that they momentarily arrest this temporal unfolding. Finally, this contradictory moment of standstill is confronted with Adorno’s insistence of the necessity for motion – the adherence to the motivic, developmental musical technique. This new understanding of Benjamin’s dialectical image in musical terms reveals itself as eminently able of briefly halting an hitherto fleeting experience of a type of music often seen as unintelligible in traditional music analytic and aesthetic terms.

### **Music as a temporal art: history and critique**

The notion of temporal unfolding as an essential characteristic of music and poetry, setting it apart from the other, spatial arts was a distinction established by Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, (1744-1803). See George Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Wesleyan University Press, 1983) (2<sup>nd</sup> edition); on the distinction in

The German scholar Constanze Peres argues that the distinction was related to the *Ut-pictura-poesis* problem – from Horace’s first century AD, *De arte poetica* – literally ‘as is painting so is poetry,’ or ‘poetry resembles painting.’<sup>423</sup> Handed down through Plutarch, the philosopher Simonides famously described poetry as ‘vocal painting’ and painting as ‘silent poetry.’<sup>424</sup> Leonardo da Vinci realigned the *paragone* or hierarchical battle between the arts, by calling poetry blind painting:

It was Lessing who thematized the *Ut-pictura-poesia* problem in his *Laocoön* (1766), his response in the polemic with Winckelmann’s and the Comte de Carlus’s art-historical classicism. Lessing tried to establish the boundaries between the plastic arts and poetry. Using the *Laocoön* statue exhibited in the Vatican Museum as an example, Lessing describes at the same time how the artist found the ‘fertile moment’ [*fruchtbaren Augenblicke*] in which an entire story is summarized, in this case the story of the priest *Laocoön* and his sons. The spectator can empathize with the tension in the events, which shows a battle that is not yet won nor lost in this singular, ambivalent moment. He explains the independence of both visual arts and poetry in their relationship to space and time: ‘Time-succession [*Zeitfolge*] is the field of the writer, [in the same way] as space is the field of the painter.’<sup>425</sup>

According to Peres, Lessing eventually ‘preferred poetry as an artform for its transitoriness, in so far as it does not statically represent the imaginative ‘fruitful’ or ‘incisive’ moment, but instead the course of events, which inspires the imagination.’<sup>426</sup> Within three years Herder criticized Lessing for

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terms of the two types of art, see Johann G. Herder, ‘Kritische Wälder, 1. Wäldchen’ (1769), in E. Naumann (ed.), *Herders Werke. Auswahl in acht Teilen*, Vol. 2

<sup>423</sup> Constanze Peres, ‘Raumzeitliche Strukturgemeinsamkeiten bildnerische und musikalische Werke,’ in Tatjana Böhme and Klaus Mehner (eds.), *Zeit und Raum in Musik und bildender Kunst*, (Cologne, Böhlau, 2000), p. 10

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 11

reducing poetry to temporality, however, whilst it is rather music that is of this essence. The former also identified the dichotomy of spatial and temporal, static and transitory, simultaneous and successive arts with the plastic arts (to him synonymous with painting) and music.<sup>427</sup>

Herder himself wrote that whilst a clear separation is possible, both the spatial and the temporal arts seem to attempt in different ways to let separate elements or tones coexist, or connect them:

Painting completely works through space, in the same way as music through time-succession [*Zeitfolge*]... whilst with the former the effect of [plastic] art is based on the sight of the coexisting elements, so is the succession, the linking and change of the tones the means of the musical effect.<sup>428</sup>

Herder also sees this distinction as normative, in the sense that music should not paint objects in space, and painting should not elicit in us an illusion of time-succession, otherwise, as Peres explains, the arts ‘will become bungled or dilettantish [*stümperhaft*].’<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>428</sup> ‘Malerei wirkt ganz durch den Raum, so wie Musik durch die Zeitfolge... Wie bei jener auf dem Anblicke des Koexistenten...die Wirkung der Kunst beruhet, so ist in dieser das Sukzessive, die Verknüpfung und Abwechslung der Töne das Mittel der musikalischen Wirkung.’ Johann Gottfried Herder, ‘Kritische Wälder, 1. Wäldchen’ (1769), in *Herders Werke. Auswahl in acht Teilen*, ed. E. Naumann, Part 2, p. 19-70, 128-129. As cited by Constanze Peres, *op. cit.*, p. 11

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 11



### Musical time in twentieth-century philosophy

In this next section I consider a number of the twentieth-century approaches to the study of *time*, by way of introducing the problem of musical time in twentieth-century *music*. However, as will become clear, even listing or classifying the different ways of considering the problem of time proves rather difficult. Hence a focus is required as to how specific theories held sway over the artistic programmes of a number of composers considered here. This means that a connection between the historical idea of music as a temporal art became a critical issue for composers, whose compositional technique underwent a considerable change under influence of their new insights – as we will see in the last three chapters of this dissertation. From the broad range of philosophies of time, some have had more of an influence than others; for example, Henri Bergson's theories were held in high estimation for a considerable period of time. However, other ways of approaching the issue of time have been equally influential. Constanze Peres, amongst others, distinguishes three basic approaches: 'scientific,' 'existentialist,' and 'empirical-analytical.'<sup>430</sup> Her overview groups philosophers according to these three approaches:

- (i) Time in this first, scientific sense is considered as the fourth dimension of a space-time continuum, which 'according to the calculations of relativity theory as a variable 't' measures a relative value, and which is symmetrical and not directed, in other words reversible. Reference values like past, present and future play no role at all.'<sup>431</sup>
- (ii) A second conception of time goes 'against the physically founded conceptions of time and its mere calculating or geometric-spatial conception [...] for example Husserl's phenomenology, the existential-analytical approach of Heidegger and the vitalist

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 19-24

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

philosophy of Bergson. These conceptions share the absolutely fundamental status of time.<sup>432</sup>

- (iii) Finally, empirical and analytic philosophy consider time from an experiential and a linguistic point of view, respectively. Proponents of this theory are William James (a pragmatist and empiricist),<sup>433</sup> Bertrand Russell and John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart,<sup>434</sup> who argue that the experience of time can be seen as twofold: an A-series is formed by our expression of the experience of time as ‘past-presence-future,’ in such a manner that the relative value always functions in the presence of a speaking ‘I’. A second, B-series is formed by (descriptive) expressions independent from the point of view of a specific ‘I’, such as ‘before (something)’, ‘simultaneous (with)’ – later (than)’, which then found the successive nature of time as such.

Although in essence meant as a brief and general overview of twentieth century philosophical approaches to the understanding of time, Peres’s list is incomplete and extremely reductive. As argued below, it is against such categorizations that Benjamin and Adorno’s philosophies argue, especially in their critical reading of historical conceptions of time, Bergson’s conception of time as *temps durée* (duration) and *temps espace* (spatial time or clock-time) and how to translate these insights into the language of music and musical temporality. However, before turning to Benjamin and Adorno’s conceptions of historical and musical time, I consider another relevant book which deals directly with the changing conceptions of time in twentieth century musical history: Eva-Maria Houben’s *Die Aufklärung der Zeit: zum Utopie unbegrenzter Gegenwart in der Musik*

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> See the chapter on the perception of time in William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (New York, Henry Holt, 1890)

<sup>434</sup> See John M. E. McTaggart and S. V. Keeling, *Philosophical Studies*, (New York; London, Longmans, E. Arnold & Co., 1934)

*des 20. Jahrhunderts*.<sup>435</sup> In it, the author sets out to define the general tendency of twentieth century art as a ‘sublation’ [*Aufhebung*] and an ‘overcoming’ [*Überwindung*] of time. At first, she sees a number of similarities between artistic programs of numerous artists, including the writers Rainer Maria Rilke, Anatole France, visual artists Paul Klee<sup>436</sup> and Wassily Kandinsky, and composers like Ferruccio Busoni, who ‘developed the presentation of a “sublation of time” [*Aufhebung der Zeit*] in the sense of a sublation of the course of time, the temporal succession.’<sup>437</sup> Later, Ernst Krenek is quoted as ‘opposing the course of time, which finds its expression in the idea of regressiveness [*Rückläufigkeit*].’<sup>438</sup> These ‘different statements,’ according to Houben,

allow to close in at first on a uniform chain of thought; nevertheless, straight away it must be asked, to what extent the conceptions are to be generalized as a “sublation” or an “overcoming” of time, [or] the thought of an “opposition” to time.<sup>439</sup>

In other words, it is a perilous endeavour to frame the question of musical time in its different guises and presence in the work of twentieth century composers, and especially in its relation to space, or more precisely the issue of the *spatialization* of *musical time*. However, Houben subsequently develops this mystical conception of time into a *typology* of a large number of temporal-spatial compositional approaches. Its philosophical underpinnings are based on the

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<sup>435</sup> Eva-Maria Houben, *Die Aufhebung Der Zeit: Zur Utopie unbegrenzter Gegenwart in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 1992), p. 18

<sup>436</sup> See Massimo Cacciari and Paul Klee, *L'angelo Necessario*. (Milano, Adelphi, 1986); translated by Massimo Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994); on the correspondences between Wols and Paul Klee, see Karin Orchard, et al., *Die Erfindung der Natur. Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Wols und das Surreale Universum*, (Freiburg im Breisgau, Rombach, 1994)

<sup>437</sup> Houben, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Houben does not give any specific examples of this in the actual music of Busoni.

<sup>438</sup> Ernst Krenek, *Über Neue Musik: Sechs Vorlesungen Zur Einführung in Die Theoretischen Grundlagen*. (Wien, Ringbuchhandlung, 1937), as quoted in Eva-Maria Houben, *op. cit.*, p. 213

<sup>439</sup> Eva-Maria Houben, *Die Aufhebung der Zeit*, *ibid.*

work of Jean Gebser, a twentieth century ‘integral’ philosopher.<sup>440</sup> The thesis includes a consultation of composers, including Bernd-Alois Zimmermann, and Houben’s own experience as a musician, particularly as an improviser. This inquiry results in a proposed typology of musical time in twentieth-century compositional practice according to the following categories: a) standstill [*Stillstand*], b) dissolution of space [*Raumauflösung*], c) spatial contraction [*Raumzerdehnung*] and d) volatilization [*Verflüchtigung*], framing the central (Gebser-inspired) concept of *un-time* [*Unzeit*] ‘in the sense of a spiral-shaped progression.’<sup>441</sup> These concepts ‘are pictorial descriptions of processes of dissolution: space, which through conceptualization, periodicity and invariance also increases clarity in music, is dissolved, disintegrated, expanded to the limits and beyond of human comprehension.’<sup>442</sup> This poetic conceptualization of musical temporality is highly problematic, as it often resorts to a theological, ‘integral’ language, especially in its attempts to systematize the *totality* of twentieth century musical repertoire.

Another work on musical time with *comprehensive* claims is Jonathan Kramer’s *The Time of Music*.<sup>443</sup> It details not only traditional notions of musical time, but also the changing understanding and perception of time in the twentieth century. Of particular interest are the chapters dealing with what Kramer terms *temporal multiplicity* (Chapter 6), linearity and non-linearity (Chapter 7), discontinuity and the moment (Chapter 8), the perception of musical time (Chapter 11) and the notion of timelessness and vertical time (Chapter 12). It is this last Chapter that is of the greatest

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<sup>440</sup> Jean Gebser (1905-1973). His philosophy attempted to connect scientific and spiritual forms of consciousness. Houben quotes extensively from Jean Gebser, *Ursprung und Gegenwart*. (Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1949). Translated as *The Ever-Present Origin*, (Athens, OH, Ohio University Press, 1985). Houben, *op. cit.*, p. 17ff.

<sup>441</sup> Houben, *op. cit.*, p. 17

<sup>442</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music : New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies*, (New York, Schirmer Books, 1988)

interest to the current thesis, as it details the sources of *vertical* time, amongst others in the work of Morton Feldman.<sup>444</sup> Kramer explains:

The composer whose music perhaps best epitomizes vertical time was Morton Feldman. While Cage has remained concerned with the compositional process, which can be linear even when the resulting music is not, Feldman simply put down one beautiful sound after another. Feldman's aesthetic had nothing to do with teleology: 'I make one sound and then I move on to the next.'<sup>445</sup>

Interestingly, Kramer also refers to the work of Samuel Beckett:

The creation of extended, non-linear nows is common to many artworks of our century. The plays of Samuel Beckett, for example, create an extended present without past and future.<sup>446</sup>

Kramer draws on the work of Ruby Cohn, who explains that Beckett's plays are 'endless continua',<sup>447</sup> without a beginning or an end. In a subsequent 'analytic interlude' he points out that

Cohn's penetrating criticisms of Beckett's plays, only briefly excerpted here, exemplify the only viable way to analyze the extended present in temporal artworks. A structural analysis of time in an artwork is not really possible when the time that work creates is a timeless present. [...] It is not simply that adequate analytic tools have not been developed. There is a fundamental incompatibility between the nature of vertical time and the process of music analysis, at least as it is traditionally construed. Many of the things analysis values most are what vertical time pointedly denies: tonal, rhythmic, and metric hierarchies; contrast; closure; development. Most analytic methods are hierarchic, implicitly if not explicitly, but vertical music is antihierarchic.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 386

<sup>445</sup> Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, translated by Jan Hautekiet, (New York, Alexander Broude, 1983), p. 106.

Cited by Jonathan Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 386

<sup>446</sup> Jonathan Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 387

<sup>447</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theater* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 35. Cited by Jonathan Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 388

<sup>448</sup> Jonathan Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 388

Even Kramer, whilst criticizing traditional analysis, does come up against the boundaries of his own descriptive method, which he concludes after a brief analysis of Fredric Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1973):

It is not by accident that this analysis has studied the minimal linear aspects of the piece in considerable detail [sic]<sup>449</sup> yet has only general things to say about the nonlinearity. Once the three large nonlinear structures – the additive-subtractive process, the canonic procedure that results when the players get lost, and the melody itself – are described, what else can be said? Since these three structures are laid out in the score itself, the analysis really has *nothing* [my stress] to add of large-scale significance. It must look instead to the smaller linear processes and details.

Kramer's reflection upon his own inability to analyze this work indicates the generalizing tendency of many of the points he makes. His book attempts to list *all* types of musical time, leading to the following concluding remarks:

[...] all varieties of musical time that civilization has known exist today. The eclecticism of musical styles in the last quarter of the twentieth century comes, in part, from the coexistence and interaction of very different temporal structures. We as listeners (and as composers and performers) know, and know how to utilize, many varieties of musical time. Thus the meaning of our music are vast and varied. And, in response, our listening strategies are (or at least should be) flexible and creative.<sup>450</sup>

With this conclusion, the difficulty of understanding the changes in musical time, especially as understood by composers of the musical avant-garde of the postwar period, becomes clear. Since Kramer's overview of and attempts to show the interaction between different types of musical time, scholarship has moved on to new levels of understanding. In the following part of

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<sup>449</sup> The complete analysis is laid out in less than two pages of text (with another page of comments on the analysis); the latter describes mostly the linear aspect of this (self-declared) non-linear work: 'the gradual addition of new notes; the increase in the number of successive eighth notes; the emergence of metric regularity; the long-range stepwise pitch connections; the progressive buildup of one seven-note mode; and the emergence of canons and the increase in their number of voices.' See Jonathan Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 393

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

this chapter, the idea of the possibility of *discontinuous* time in the musical artwork is studied in terms of a theory of musical time not included in Kramer's work. In fact, his generalizing statements on, amongst others, Feldman and Beckett, are contradicted by their collaborative projects, including Feldman's opera *Neither* and his music for Beckett's radio play *Words and Music*.

The radical alternative to these theories of a generalist type can be found, in my estimation, in the aesthetics and philosophy of time in the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. In this regard, and in order to fully contextualize and relate Adorno's and Benjamin's respective aesthetics, a brief overview of the main works of the secondary literature reveals a plethora of interpretations. This combined literature can be grouped according to subject matter. In the first place, the by now standard works on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* must include Lambert Zuidervaat's book by the same name.<sup>451</sup> Moreover, a collection of essays on *Aesthetic Theory*, *The Semblance of Subjectivity*<sup>452</sup> was published under his and Tom Huhn's editorship, in an attempt to highlight Adorno's critique of traditional concepts, by 'reconceptualizing philosophical insights that restores their critical and speculative sharpness in a society that blunts both critique and speculation.'<sup>453</sup> This work is of seminal importance in any study of Adorno's aesthetics. Introducing the authors and showing the scope of this project, Zuidervaat writes:

The philosophical underpinning of Adorno's project is illuminated in the essays on *The Semblance of Subjectivity* [...]. Rolf Tiedemann's essay demonstrates that a "utopia of knowledge" guides all of

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<sup>451</sup> Lambert Zuidervaat, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. The Redemption of Illusion*, (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), (Cambridge, Mass.; London, The MIT Press, 1991)

<sup>452</sup> Tom Huhn, and Lambert Zuidervaat, *The Semblance of Subjectivity : Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Studies in contemporary German social thought), (Cambridge, Mass.; London, The MIT Press, 1997)

<sup>453</sup> Lambert Zuidervaat, *Introduction*, in *op. cit.*, p. 9-10

Adorno's work and that without it both Adorno's aesthetics and his critiques of society and philosophy would lose their point.<sup>454</sup>

In disagreement with contemporary German thinkers, Adorno, like Ernst Bloch, 'holds that historical labour is necessary for the arrival of a "true society," and existing traces of utopia are needed in order to keep open the possibility of something different from the current societal whole, which is false.'<sup>455</sup> Adorno's 'conception of utopia as a reconciled condition in which the alien' – the part of the artwork which Adorno considers non-identical, the proverbial wrench in the machine – 'is not annexed, can be translated,' according to Jürgen Habermas, 'into the ideal of non-coercive communication.'<sup>456</sup> Against this early reconciliation of utopia and language, Tiedemann argues that 'such a translation overlooks Adorno's grounds for holding to the utopian idea of universal reconciliation.'<sup>457</sup> Language in this sense is the 'autonomous expression of that which cannot be communicated,' not a tool for (human) communicative action as Habermas would argue. Adorno's 'conception of utopia derives from the idea of a language in which word and thing unite without loss.'<sup>458</sup> This conception of a language which is aware of its domination over the world of objects has its repercussions on philosophical language, considered by Benjamin and Adorno to be the language of concepts and conceptualizations.

Adorno's negative dialectic acknowledges the abstraction built into the conceptual language of philosophy, even as he critiques such abstraction and confronts it with the idea of the non-conceptual – that which is fully concrete, nonidentical, and unintentional.<sup>459</sup>

Tiedemann explains how Adorno avoids traditional forms of conceptualization – which subsumes the concrete under abstract, universal concepts – through the interpretation of *images*.

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.



This is a crucial aspect of the text, as it sheds light on the emergence of the *dialectical* image in the work of Benjamin and Adorno. Tiedemann writes in this regard that it was in ‘conversation with Benjamin that Adorno developed a theory of dialectical images, according to which historical material can be made to produce a critical consciousness of capitalist society.’<sup>460</sup> He paraphrases

Benjamin’s own idea of the constellation as a form of bringing together elements which have hitherto not lined up or been associated with one another, but come together briefly and disappear as soon as they have appeared, when he writes that ‘in these kaleidoscopic constellations, the philosopher can grasp whatever escapes the net of conceptual abstraction. Such an approach allows for considerable fantasy and spontaneity.’<sup>461</sup>

For Tiedemann, the knowledge which can appear from such work is strongly linked with Benjamin and Adorno’s interest in art: ‘It does not hesitate to learn from artworks that mobilize a different potential for knowledge than that of ordinary language and systematic philosophy.’<sup>462</sup> He concludes that the reading of images grasps something more permanent (as *knowledge*) than the image’s transitoriness would suggest: ‘In a sense, the philosophical reader of dialectical images is a composer of concepts [my stress].’<sup>463</sup> For Tiedemann, Adorno’s philosophy-as-interpretation can thus be seen as based on a ‘somewhat mystical view of language, inherited from Benjamin, according to which things possess their own language.’<sup>464</sup> Adorno’s philosophy tries to find an answer to this language of things and ‘conjuring a unity from the alienated and abstracted features of reified phenomena.’<sup>465</sup> In contrast to Habermas’s communicative action,

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., p.15

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

‘the communication Adorno sought would occur between object and subject, not simply among human beings.’<sup>466</sup>

I will now consider issues specifically relating to Adorno’s aesthetics. This discussion will include

- (i) the importance of Adorno’s later thinking on the experience of the artwork as temporal, in the light of Benjamin’s writings on *experience* (briefly, considering Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, which deals with the transitoriness of experience and how it is made permanent in knowledge); I will then reconsider the implication of this for the *musical* artwork, as our experience of the musical artwork is very much bound up with its temporal unfolding.
- (ii) Adorno’s later thinking proceeded from a general critique of the bourgeois notion of *progress* (as evidenced in an essay from *Critical Models* on progress) to a project of reconceptualization in which he sought to redeem totally reified concepts and categories, including the idea of artistic progress.

However, I first turn to the problematical relation between temporality, as historical time and musical time, and the traditional notions of time; moreover, the implications for the concept of the work of art, of central importance to the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, are explicated by a study of key texts. One of the most important works written by Benjamin in this regard is without a doubt his *Theses on the Concept of History*,<sup>467</sup> as they were later named, which proved very influential to a number of writers’ and commentators’ work, as well as for a number of Adorno’s own later writings, including *Critical Models*, *Negative Dialectics*, *Aesthetic Theory*, and the

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn, and edited by Hannah Ahrendt, (New York, Schocken, 1968)

essays in *Quasi una Fantasia*. As such, they do not form a *comprehensive* theory of temporality, but present a critique of bourgeois theories of history, contemporary political praxis and theories of the artwork. I will return to these *Theses*, especially to the way Benjamin ordered them as images, and the relation of historical time and the time of the work of art.

In this context, Rainer Rochlitz stressed that ‘from a systematic point of view, the centre of all this work of reflection is the question of the work of art.’<sup>468</sup> He sees its place in Benjamin’s oeuvre as strategic, ‘where the theological situation of the contemporary age, the source of tradition and of memory, manifests itself;’<sup>469</sup> however, more specifically the *modern* work of art is also ‘the stakes in multiple subversions that target the deceptiveness of art’s appearance, its illusory beauty, myth and ideology.’<sup>470</sup> Rochlitz argues that a fundamental aporia exists in Benjamin’s thought, which is formed around the *philosophical* need for art, ‘formulated in the name of truth,’ and a need ‘to reduce the ambiguity and illusions that are linked to art in the name of that same truth.’<sup>471</sup> This results in a dialectics of disenchantment – the Enlightenment process of demythologizing the world and its illusions – ‘combined with the recurrent image of a rescue operation.’<sup>472</sup> This double process could be seen as sympathetic to that of modern art itself, characterized as a ‘self-destructive adventure, of which Benjamin has become, for that very reason, one of the exemplary theorists.’<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *The disenchantment of art : the philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, (New York, Guilford Press, 1996), p. 260

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

In the next part of this chapter, I consider Adorno's and Benjamin's conceptualization of time from the point of view of their philosophies of history and language, and how this study informs their respective aesthetics. Through a comparative reading of a number of key texts by both philosophers, as well as the work of a number of commentators, further methodological considerations can be outlined, based on the theoretical common ground between their theories of history and their aesthetics. This discussion aims to frame the development of Benjamin's theory of the *dialectical image*, as well as Adorno's adoption of it in his own work. In their opinion, traditional philosophies of history and aesthetics are totalizing, systematic theories, which negate the often inconvenient, fragmented elements of history and subsume the complexities of reality under the hierarchy of philosophy as a *language of concepts*. Central to their critique is the concept of *progress* in its timeless and universal incarnation, which, however, is to be *rescued* in philosophical terms. This means that an understanding of this concept as static is not only untenable in the light of its own *history* as a changing category, but one that is ultimately still useful, not only in the aesthetic context of modernist works of art, including the notion of a *musique informelle*, but also as a conceptual tool that is able to bring together a number of elements relating to the notion of (musical) temporality. In their opinion, it is precisely through a study of the (material) objects themselves – which 'speak' in what Benjamin called the (mute) *language of objects* – that a dialectical historical method can be established. In this sense, concepts take on a functional role, no longer as traditional tools for naming and defining objects, but as inextricably linked to these phenomena. Benjamin's method combines a *materialist* critique with the language of Jewish mystic theology, which is appropriated in a non-transcendental sense, as *profane illumination*. This approach does not simply produce newly 'improved' concepts – such as artistic progress – but arranges the fragmentary elements of the everyday in new constellations, which – when momentarily brought to a standstill – reveals something about the past forming what Benjamin called a dialectical image. The resulting moment, arresting the seemingly continuous

flow of time, brings together the object with its interpretation, an insight on which both Benjamin's and Adorno's entire aesthetic theories are built. From a philosophical point of view, this interpretational method is formulated in terms of a *reading* of objects, without necessarily attempting to fix them conceptually. According to Adorno, the task of the philosopher is precisely to arrange these elements in a constellation, allowing for them to momentarily reveal something he calls *objectively true* about the social and historical environment in which they were created. The resulting images, however, are not simply depictions of a past reality from which they have been distanced in time, but can (only) be read and interpreted from the vantage point of the present. In this regard, Benjamin's writings themselves contain a number of these dialectical images, including the image of the 'angel of history,' which is based on a reading of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus novus*.

Central to this interpretative strategy or reading is the idea of the *experience* of time, which Benjamin formulated in relation to both Kant's and Bergson's respective philosophies. Both Benjamin and Adorno, as I have already shown, criticized Bergson's *dualist* concept of time as *temps durée*, or *lived* time, and *temps espace*, or mechanical time. For Benjamin, Bergson's experience of time as *temps durée* was put to the test by Marcel Proust, in his *À la recherche du temps perdu*,<sup>474</sup> which 'may be regarded as an attempt to produce experience [...] in a synthetic way under today's social conditions, for there is less and less hope that it will come into being in a natural way.'<sup>475</sup> The reason behind Benjamin's investigation lies in the question about the relationship between

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<sup>474</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin and Andreas Mayor (Vol. 7); revised by D.J. Enright, (London, Chatto and Windus; New York, The Modern Library, 1992)

<sup>475</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in Walter Benjamin, et al., *Selected writings*, Vol. 4, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press., 1996), p. 315. Benjamin's (and Adorno's) reading of Bergson's *Matière et Mémoire* is not only significant as a critique of experiential time in itself; it is also a key work for Morton Feldman's conception of the instrumental image, which will be studied later in this thesis. See also Aniruddha Chowdury, *Memory, Modernity, Repetition: Walter Benjamin's History*, in *Telos*, Vol. 43 (Summer 2008), pp. 22–46

the dialectical image and the artwork: works of art lay bare important truths about the time and society in which they were made, ‘even in the process of attempting to distance themselves from that reality.’<sup>476</sup> Benjamin’s inquiry into a new theory of cognition and experience explicitly informed Adorno’s writings up to and including *Aesthetic Theory*. Finally, it is in this light that Adorno’s dialectical concepts, including *musical material* as temporally and spatially mediated, including in its appearance as *musique informelle*, can be situated.

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<sup>476</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 262

### On the concept of history, progress and the image

In order to frame the question of how time and concepts of temporality in general and in musical terms have changed over time, it is necessary to turn to a particular aspect of this problem. The question here is how much Benjamin's<sup>477</sup> and Adorno's<sup>478</sup> theories of time rely on their critique of the nineteenth-century *idealist* concept of progress. It is interesting to see how, on the one hand, they both criticized this concept, and on the other hand, how Adorno rescues it in terms of his aesthetics. This re-formulated conception of aesthetic progress, then, becomes a key motif in his *Aesthetic Theory* and other late writings, such as 'Vers une musique informelle,' as discussed at length before in this thesis. Criticizing both dogmatically Marxist and messianic, theological interpretations of Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History,' Rolf Tiedemann writes that 'only criticism directed at their material – and "truth contents" – and not primarily at political applications – can benefit the interpretation of the theses.'<sup>479</sup> Adorno, as we will see, seems to start the other way around, in his *Progress* essay, by drawing attention to Benjamin's linking of the idea of progress and humanity [*Menschheit*]<sup>480</sup> in his critique of the social-

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<sup>477</sup> Bhesham R. Sharma, *Music and Culture in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, (New York, Peter Lang, 2000)

<sup>478</sup> Albrecht Riethmüller, 'Theodor W. Adorno und der Fortschritt in der Musik,' in Wilfred Gruhn (ed.), *Das Projekt Moderne und Postmoderne*, (Regensburg, Bosse, 1989), p. 15-34

<sup>479</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, 'Concept, Image, Name: On Adorno's Utopia of Knowledge,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaat, *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essay in Adorno's Aesthetics*, (Cambridge, Mass., The Mit Press, 1997), pp. 125

<sup>480</sup> The translation of the word *Menschheit* as *humanity* is stressed by some translators as significant, as it contains the double meaning of its German original: *Menschheit* can refer both to an abstract principle, as well as the 'sum of existing human beings.' See Henry Pickford's note in Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models, Interventions and Catchwords*, (European Perspectives), (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998), footnote 1, p. 353. Pickford explains that in the first 'model' of *Negative Dialectics*, in a section entitled 'Ontological and Ideal Moments,' Adorno explores this ambiguity of *Menschheit* in Kant's moral theory, concluding that 'Kant must have noticed the double meaning of the word "humanity," as the idea of being human and as the totality of all men; he introduced it into theory in a manner that was dialectically profound, even though playful. His subsequent usage vacillates between ontical manners of speech and others that refer to the idea [...]. He wants neither to cede the idea of humanity to the existing society nor to vaporise it into a phantasm.' See *Negative Dialectics*, translated by

democratic politics of his day. The idea of humanity also returns in Adorno's later work, especially in his *Aesthetic Theory*, in direct relation to what he calls the 'redemption of appearance.'<sup>481</sup> However, Benjamin's main argument consists of a critique of the status quo of traditional conceptions of history and their reliance on the bourgeois concept of total progress. In his opinion, it was no longer convincing that every historical event derives from another by necessity and that all events together constitute a progressive motion. The historicist school of thought especially draws his fire:

Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. Materialistic historiography differs from it as to method more clearly than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time.<sup>482</sup>

Universalist histories such as Kant's and Hegel's, have what David Couzens-Hoy calls 'an unconscious tendency [...] to assume that we are going into the future facing forward.'<sup>483</sup> It is not only *historical* concepts Benjamin and Adorno criticize, but *concepts* themselves – when understood as universals and which extinguish the particularity of phenomena.<sup>484</sup>

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E.B. Ashton (New York, Seabury Press, 1973), p. 258. Pickford concludes: 'In this essay *Menschheit* is consistently translated as 'humanity' to preserve the doubleness. By contrast German *Humanität*, which also occurs in this essay, derives from the Latin *humanitas*, and signifies not the ontic human species but rather the ideal of humane refinement as a mark of civilisation; it is translated as "humanitarianism."

<sup>481</sup> The German word *Schein* is variously translated as 'illusion' (see Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic theory: the redemption of illusion*, *op. cit.*), 'appearance' (see Rainer Rochlitz, *The disenchantment of art: the philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, *op. cit.*) or even as 'semblance' (see Walter Benjamin, 'On Semblance,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 223-225). Benjamin plays on the word 'Schein' and the verb 'erscheinen' throughout this essay, and as the translator notes, also in the essay on 'Goethes Elective Affinities,' pp. 297-360

<sup>482</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p. 254

<sup>483</sup> David Couzens-Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, (Cambridge Mass, The MIT Press, 2009), p. 153

<sup>484</sup> H. Védérine notes that Hegel's idealism manifests itself in 'the paradox of all philosophies of history: to grasp the sense of development, one must find the focal point in which the events are abolished in their singularity and where they become meaningful according to a grid which allows their interpretation. In its totalization, the



Rather than trying to find underlying, elucidating concepts in Benjamin's theses, Tiedemann argues that 'at the center of his text is no discursive explanation, but an *image* instead.'<sup>485</sup> This image appears in the ninth thesis, as 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage,' an enormous 'pile of debris' that 'reaches up to the sky.'<sup>486</sup> In fact, one of the first significant images, about a chess-playing automaton, is presented in the opening thesis:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. This puppet, for Benjamin, stands for historical materialism, and is to win at all times. It can do this with no further ado against any opponent, so long as it employs the services of theology, which as everyone knows is small and ugly and must be kept out of sight.<sup>487</sup>

As Marc Jimenez argues, this alliance was explicitly set up to counter Heidegger's ontology, which he described in a letter in 1931, while at the same time directed against the 'scientific idealist bourgeois activities.'<sup>488</sup> However, as Marc Jimenez further points out, this fascination comes at a price<sup>489</sup> as it is based on the myth of *progress* – the 'distorting mirror' [*le miroir trompeur*] which promises a better future, assured by the programme of emancipation of the workers and

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system produces a *concept* [my stress] of its object in order for the object to become rational and to escape in this way the unexpected, and a temporality where chance could play its role.'

<sup>485</sup> Tiedemann, *op. cit.*,

<sup>486</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 249

<sup>487</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 245

<sup>488</sup> As quoted by Marc Jimenez, *Adorno et la modernité*, (Paris, Klincksieck), p. 199, translated into French: Walter Benjamin, *Correspondance II*, p. 43, letter to Max Rychner, 7 March 1931

<sup>489</sup> Marc Jimenez, *op. cit.*, p. 197-198

the class struggle.<sup>490</sup> Against this belief, Benjamin argues that on the other hand, we can be certain that this ‘pseudo-progress constitutes a real obstacle to redemption.’<sup>491</sup> According to Adorno, the problem of progress, in light of the Kantian conception of history, lies in its dependence on being part of a historical and social totality, developed as a bourgeois ideal.<sup>492</sup> An important aspect of progress for Benjamin is its adoption in political terms; Adorno understands Benjamin’s critique of his political contemporaries in the *Progress* essay from the perspective of the connection between progress and humanity:

The concept of history, in which progress would have its place, is emphatic, the Kantian universal or cosmopolitan concept, not one of any particular sphere of life. But the dependence of progress on the totality comes back to bite progress.

Furthermore, Adorno sees Benjamin’s essay as a critique of contemporary Social-Democratic politics, whose futile struggle against fascism furnished in turn an important impetus of the theses. In particular, Benjamin, according to Adorno, refutes their coupling of progress and humanity ‘held by those who are reckoned in a crudely political fashion as progressives: Progress as pictured in the minds of Social Democrats was, first of all, the progress of humanity itself (and not just advances in people’s skills and knowledge).’<sup>493</sup> The critique of the political understanding of progress, however, stands in contrast to the notion of progress in philosophical (aesthetic) reflection, which is ‘more a reproach [of the idea] that the Social Democrats confused progress of skills and knowledge with that of humanity, rather than that he wanted to eradicate progress

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<sup>490</sup> Marc Jimenez, *op. cit.*, p. 198 [‘d’un avenir meilleur assuré par le programme d’émancipation des travailleurs, et de la lutte de classes.’]

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198

<sup>492</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, in *Critical models*, *op. cit.*, p. 145

<sup>493</sup> As quoted by Adorno, in Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, ed. Theodor W. Adorno and Gretel Adorno, with Friedrich Podszus (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1955), 1, p. 502. Translator’s note: Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn, and edited by Hannah Arendt, (New York, Schocken, 1968), p. 260 (Thesis 13) (translation modified).

from philosophical reflection.’<sup>494</sup> In Benjamin’s essay, progress obtains legitimation in the doctrine which claims that the idea of the happiness of unborn generations – without which one cannot speak of progress – inalienably includes the idea of redemption.<sup>495</sup> Adorno writes that

This confirms the concentration of progress on the survival of the species: no progress is to be assumed that would imply that humanity in general already existed and therefore could progress. Rather progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place, whose prospect opens up in the face of its extinction. This entails, as Benjamin further writes, that the concept of universal history cannot be saved; it is plausible only as long as one can believe in the illusion of an already existing humanity, coherent in itself and moving upward as a unity. If humanity remains entrapped by the totality it itself fashions, then, as Kafka said, no progress has taken place at all, while the mere totality nevertheless allows progress.<sup>496</sup>

Here, Adorno points to the dangers of a ‘total’ definition of humanity, as that which excludes absolutely nothing.

If humanity were a totality that no longer held within it any limiting principle, then it would also be free of the coercion that subjects all its members to such a principle and thereby would no longer be a totality: no forced unity.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, in *op. cit.*, p 145

<sup>495</sup> Ibid. p. 494, translator’s note: English, Ibid. 253-254 (Thesis 2).

<sup>496</sup> Henry Pickford, notes that here, ‘as in his essay of Kafka in *Prisms* (and GS 8, p. 229), Adorno’s partial quotation neglects Kafka’s emphasis on the mutual implication of progress and belief. Kafka’s aphorism is quoted in its entirety by Benjamin in ‘Franz Kafka: on the Tenth Anniversary of his Death’: ‘To believe in progress is not to believe that progress has already taken place. That would be no belief.’ Kafka did not consider the age in which he lived as an advance over the beginnings of time. His novels are set in a swamp world. In his works, created things appear at the stage Bachofen has termed the hetaeric stage. The fact that it is now forgotten does not mean that it does not extend into the present. On the contrary: it is actual by virtue of this very oblivion.’ See *Illuminations*, p. 130, as quoted on p. 353-354.

<sup>497</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, in *op. cit.*, p 145

It is significant that Adorno uses an excerpt from Schiller's *Ode to Joy* (and the way Beethoven set it in his *Ninth* Symphony) to underline this point, as it refers to the analogous idea of an all-encompassing love:

“And who never could, let him steal away/weeping from this league,” which in the name of all-encompassing love banishes whoever has not been granted it, unintentionally admits the truth about the bourgeois, at once totalitarian and particular, concept of humanity.<sup>498</sup>

For Adorno, in this verse, what the one who is unloved or incapable of love undergoes

in the name of the idea of humanity unmasks this idea, no differently than the affirmative violence with which Beethoven's music hammers it home; it is hardly a coincidence that the poem with the word ‘steal’ in the humiliation of the one who is joyless, and to whom therefore joy is once again denied, evokes associations from the spheres of property and criminology.<sup>499</sup>

In other words, progress in terms of humanity is not a simplistic progress of a technical nature, or one which defines totality as a zone of pure joy, against, as Brian O'Connor remarks, the ‘overwhelming evidence [...] that we are not yet in a position to think of the historical process as one marked by continuous progression, that is a process of “unspeakable suffering.”’<sup>500</sup> For Adorno, grief and strife are to be an aspect of this totality, not a banished other which is to be excised. As Adorno dialectically continues: ‘Perpetual antagonism is integral to the concept of totality, as in the politically totalitarian systems; thus the evil mythical festivals in fairy tales are defined by those who are not invited. Only with the decomposition of the principle of totality that establishes limits, even if that principle were merely the commandment to resemble totality, would there be humanity and not its deceptive image.’<sup>501</sup> As we will see, this attempt to penetrate

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<sup>498</sup> ‘Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle weinend sich aus diesem Bund’ from Friedrich Schiller's ode ‘An die Freude’ (1786) – quoted in Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, in *op. cit.*, p. 354

<sup>499</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> Brian O'Connor, ‘Adorno's Reconceptualization of the Dialectic,’ in Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (eds.), *A Companion to Hegel*, (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy), (Chichester, Blackwell, 2011), p. 544

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

the illusory aspect or the *appearance* of the totality of the bourgeois ideal of progress as the striving (and arrival) to unfettered human happiness underlies other aspects of Adorno's work; of particular relevance to the thesis at hand is its import for *aesthetic* progress. One commentator specifically linked the idea of progress with the musical avant-garde – the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus. In his essay *Progress and the avant garde*,<sup>502</sup> he explains how the concept of progress, from the perspective of the eighteenth century, lead Adorno to show 'how from a conventional point of view, society cannot do without progress, as it "would be completely empty"<sup>503</sup> without it – if "all its elements are abstracted from society."<sup>504</sup> Progress in this sense finds its meaning in events, such as the liberation of slaves, the improvement of living conditions, etc. However, as Adorno points out, once attempts are made to keep it pure – "to spin it out of the essence of time,"<sup>505</sup> progress loses its content. Dialectically put, Adorno states therefore that "the concept of progress is philosophical in that it articulates the movement of society while at the same time contradicting it."<sup>506</sup> This resistance, according to Adorno, could possibly be found in artworks. Adorno elaborates on his critique of the concept of progress from the perspective of the artwork in *Aesthetic Theory*. Progress in this sense refers to process of increasing rationalization through technique. Translated into musical terms, Adorno refers to the relation between supposed 'progress' in the music of the postwar avant-garde; in fact he criticizes both the nostalgic position of those critics who want to see a return to the music of the 1920s (which in some regard includes his own preferences, for example Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, whose free atonality is

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<sup>502</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, 'Progress and the Avant-garde,' in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, translated by Derrick Puffet and Alfred Clayton, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 14-22

<sup>503</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, p. 148, as cited by Carl Dahlhaus, *op. cit.*,

<sup>504</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 148

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148

presented in *Vers une musique informelle* as a model)<sup>507</sup> as ‘unquestionably grotesque’ as they would conveniently omit the intervening Third Reich-years. At the same time he criticizes those who believe ‘progress’ had been achieved in those years, as the tasks ‘bequeathed’ by Schoenberg’s generation remain unfulfilled. It is in this context that he criticizes the naive belief in technological innovation and rationalization: ‘The reproach that the critics have not understood the most recent compositions of unchecked rationalization can hardly be maintained because such musical reasoning wants only to be demonstrated mathematically, not understood.’<sup>508</sup> However, progress in terms of the musical work of art could be seen as standing in contrast to ‘reaction’ – especially if the illusion that the new musical resources available to the composer of electro-acoustic music, who ‘invents’ his sonorous material, is separated from the actual musical works. This risk is unavoidable:

It will hardly make sense today the fusion of material and work having already been achieved, that artistic means could first be mechanically invented then later find their proper employment, anymore than this possibility could be ruled out.<sup>509</sup>

However, another aspect of the work of art in the age of increasing rationalization demands the attention at this point: its image-like character. For this, I turn to the work of Walter Benjamin, who approached the image not simply in its two-dimensional understanding, but as an alternative for a rigid description of the world and the theory of universal progress. At the core of this debate is *time*, a necessary element in the make-up of the concept of progress, as argued by Adorno. When connected to the idea of *musical material* – as increasingly rationalized in serialist technique, for example – the idea that ‘progress’ is still possible or even merely useful. In

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<sup>507</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle,’ *op. cit.* On the ‘ideal image’ [*Idealbild*] of *musique informelle* and the role of *Erwartung*, see Chapter 1 and 2.

<sup>508</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Ageing of the New Music,’ in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays, op. cit.*, p. 195. Concerning the idea of ‘understanding,’ see below, especially the section on Benjamin’s work on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

contrast with a regression of the material to an earlier state of, for example, tonality, a better understanding is needed of Benjamin and Adorno's conceptions of historical time as *unfulfilled* time.

### Allegorical image and time in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* essay

Walter Benjamin's conception of time can be seen through the lens of his work on the baroque *Trauerspiel*, which in his eyes expounded a different conception of historical time. As allegorical plays, *Trauerspiele* or mourning plays – with allegorical characters including Death – were conceived in temporal terms in a rather different way than the classic tragedy. The latter is known for its underlying notion of *catharsis*, where the hero of the tragedy is confronted with a choice, which he attempts to overcome in a process of learning. This is essentially a linear, teleological conception of time. Furthermore, the contrast between tragedy and *Trauerspiel* for Benjamin can be seen from the perspective of opposing conceptions of time. The time of the *mourning* play is one which also refers to the afterlife, which it represents through some of the characters on stage. Benjamin writes in this regard:

The mourning play [*Trauerspiel*] is mathematically comparable to one branch of a hyperbola whose other branch lies in infinity. The law governing a higher life prevails in the restricted space of an earthly existence, and all play, until death puts an end to the same, so as to repeat the same game, albeit on a grander scale, in another world. It is this repetition on which the law of the mourning play is founded.<sup>510</sup>

The form of the mourning play – its sequence of events – can be described as allegorical schemata, which Benjamin likens as 'symbolic mirror-images of a different game,' for him, 'we are transported into that game by death.'<sup>511</sup> In temporal terms, Benjamin argues that 'the time of the mourning play is not fulfilled, but nevertheless it is finite. It is non-individual, but without historical universality. Its form is hybrid, and its conception of time is 'spectral, not mythic,' and

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<sup>510</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, *op. cit.*, p. 57

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.



‘is related in its innermost core to the mirror-nature of games [...],’ as it has ‘an even number of acts.’<sup>512</sup>

For Benjamin, the resulting allegorical *image* presents the events in such a way that the tragic unfolding is arrested and consequently appears as *static*. As Rolf Tiedemann points out, these deeply allegorical images confront ‘[...] the observer [...] with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape.’<sup>513</sup>

In an early text (1916)<sup>514</sup> Benjamin describes tragedy and *Trauerspiel* in terms of historical time versus tragic time and specifically how they are related.

At specific and crucial points in its trajectory, historical time passes over into tragic time; such points occur in the actions of great individuals. There is an essential connection between the ideas of greatness in history and those in tragedy – although the two are not identical.<sup>515</sup>

He explains that in art, ‘historical greatness can assume the form only of tragedy.’<sup>516</sup> ‘Historical time,’ he argues, ‘is infinite in every direction and unfulfilled at every moment.’<sup>517</sup> He claims that it is impossible to ‘conceive of a single empirical event that bears a necessary relation to the time of its occurrence.’<sup>518</sup> Importantly, for empirical events ‘time is nothing but a form, but, what is more important, as a form it is unfulfilled. The event does not fulfil the formal nature of the

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 343

<sup>514</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Trauerspiel and Tragedy,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, p. 55-57. This text remained unpublished during Benjamin's lifetime.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

time in which it takes place.<sup>519</sup> Time, then, should not be considered as ‘merely the measure that records the *duration*<sup>520</sup> of a mechanical change.’<sup>521</sup> Here, Benjamin explains there is a crucial difference between historical and mechanical time. Although mechanical time ‘is indeed a relatively empty form, to think of its being filled makes no sense. Historical time, however, differs from this mechanical time.’<sup>522</sup> Historical time ‘determines much more than the possibility of spatial changes of a specific magnitude and regularity – that is to say, like the hands of a clock – simultaneously with spatial changes of a complex nature.’<sup>523</sup> It is here that Benjamin presents the most intriguing observation of this passage: the idea that absolute determination of historical time’s essence is not possible – there is a degree of empirical indetermination – when he writes that

without specifying what goes beyond this, what else determines historical time – in short, without defining how it differs from mechanical time – we may assert that the determining force of historical time cannot be fully grasped by, or wholly concentrated in, any empirical process.<sup>524</sup>

On the other hand, if one takes the position of a ‘process that is perfect in historical terms, [it] is quite indeterminate empirically; it is in fact an idea.’<sup>525</sup> In contrast to unfulfilled historical time, Benjamin posits the idea of fulfilled time, which ‘is the dominant historical idea of the Bible: it is the idea of messianic time. Moreover, the idea of a fulfilled historical time is never identical with the idea of an individual time.’<sup>526</sup> Consequently, if one looks at the difference between this messianic time and *tragic* time, the former’s feature ‘changes the meaning of fulfilment

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

completely, and it is this that distinguishes tragic time from messianic time.<sup>527</sup> He concludes that ‘tragic time is related to the latter in the same way that an individually fulfilled time relates to a divinely fulfilled one.’<sup>528</sup> As a concrete example, Benjamin subsequently refers to Schlegel’s *Alarcos* (1802),<sup>529</sup> a play which is ‘ennobled by the distance which everywhere separates image and mirror-image, the signifier and signified.’<sup>530</sup> In this regard, another important aspect of the mourning play’s character is the idea of *repetition* in time. Benjamin notes that ‘the mourning play exhausts artistically the historical idea of repetition.’<sup>531</sup> In the same sense that historical time could not be exhaustively determined empirically, repetition undermines the idea of a unified form.<sup>532</sup> In the concluding paragraph of his essay, this leads to the following statement:

The nature of repetition in time is such that no unified form can be based on it. And even if the relation of tragedy to art remains problematic, even if it may be both more and less than an art form it nevertheless remains formally unified. Its temporal character is exhaustively shaped in the form of drama. The mourning play, on the other hand, is inherently non-unified drama, and the idea of its resolution no longer dwells within the realm of drama itself.

This crucial difference in the conception of time in the tragedy – as ultimately unified time, or time understood as teleological – versus the non-unified conception of time in the mourning play – where a series of tableaux marks a *form* which is not unified – refers to the idea that its

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Alarcos: Ein Trauerspiel. Historisch-kritische Edition mit Dokumenten*, Mark-Georg Dehrmann and Nils Gelker (eds.), (Hannover, Wehrhahn Verlag, 2013). As the editors in this critical edition explain, Schlegel’s only stage work was received rather harshly at the time. Its form was critiqued as regressive and borrowing from Baroque examples.

<sup>530</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Trauerspiel and Tragedy,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, p. 55-57

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> This is analogous to Adorno’s understanding of form in music, which as I have shown, is tied for Adorno to the historical open (for example, the rondo) and closed forms (the sonata).

individual parts could be arranged in a different sequence. Benjamin's conclusion is rather startling:

And here, on the question of form, is the point where the crucial distinction between tragedy and mourning play emerges decisively. The remains of mourning plays are called music. Perhaps there is a parallel here: just as tragedy marks the transition from historical to dramatic time, the mourning play represents the transition from dramatic time to musical time.<sup>533</sup>

This idea of time unfolding in a non-linear way in the mourning play is one which is very sympathetic to the way in which time is conceived in some of the modernist works presented here. Interestingly, the time of the mourning play is understood as *musical* by Benjamin, in direct opposition to the *developmental* idea of musical time in Adorno's work. If Adorno saw musical time as exclusively unfolding unidirectionally, according to the idea that structural parts of the composition *follow* one another in a certain fashion and not another, this suggests the centrality of this idea of temporal unfolding for his theory of *form* with regard to nineteenth-century music. This is a concept of musical form, and concurrently musical temporality, which was heavily influenced by the theoretician Eduard Hanslick.<sup>534</sup>

### **Benjamin's critique of Bergsonian duration**

For Benjamin, the above passage ties in with his general critique of time as expounded in the work of Bergson, Kant and several German romantic poets.<sup>535</sup> In this regard, and of great interest to the understanding of Benjamin's concept of time in connection with the temporal

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<sup>533</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 57

<sup>534</sup> Julian Horton, 'Brahms, Bruckner and the Concept of Thematic Process,' in Gareth Cox and Julian Horton, *Irish Musical Analysis*, (Irish Musical Studies, Vol. 11) (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2014), pp. 78-155

<sup>535</sup> See, Walter Benjamin, 'Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin "The Poet's Courage" and "Timidity,"' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 18-36

aspect of the work of art, I will briefly explain how Benjamin reads two poems by Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘The Poet’s Courage’ and ‘Timidity’:

Quite in opposition to “fleeting time,” to the “ephemeral ones,” that which persists – *duration* [my emphasis] in the form of time and men –has been developed in the new version of these lines. The phrase “turning of time [*Wende der Zeit*, in the Hölderlin poem]” plainly captures the instant of persistence as well, the moment of inner plasticity is central can become entirely clear only later, like the central importance of other hitherto demonstrated phenomena.[...] The poem is about the plastic structure of thought in its intensity – the way the contemplatively fulfilled consciousness forms the ultimate basis of its structure. The same relation of identity which here leads, in an intensive sense, to the temporal plasticity of form, must lead in an extensive sense to an infinite configured form – to a plasticity which is, as it were, buried and in which form becomes identical with the formless.<sup>536</sup>

Echoes of this approach to literature will return in Adorno’s later work, including his theorizing of the art work in ‘Vers une musique informelle’ and *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>537</sup> In terms of the work of Henri Bergson, Benjamin does not refer to Bergson by name – in this and other early writings<sup>538</sup> – he refers to his central concept of *duration* and further develops it in artistic terms. The literary theorist Peter Fenves remarks in this regard that Benjamin does not appropriate Bergson’s work, but discovers duration in ‘a passage that would otherwise be reserved from “intellectual” intuition.’<sup>539</sup> In Fenves’ view, Benjamin’s analysis puts him at odds with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, where intellectual intuition is ‘unavailable to human beings and can be attributed only to divine understanding,’<sup>540</sup> but follows in the footsteps of Fichte, Schelling and Hölderlin, who show that

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<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> The precise relation will be discussed below.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., p. 31

<sup>539</sup> Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction. Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 31

<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

philosophy or poetry has no greater task than showing how and when the intellect is itself intuitive – to which Bergson responds in his dissertation *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (essay on the immediate data of consciousness)<sup>541</sup> by denying that the qualities of time are in any way comparable to those of space.<sup>542</sup>

For Bergson, time can appear under certain circumstances as divisible, like space, but this is an illusion. Time for Bergson is indivisible but malleable, not a sequence of isolated instances. Fenves sees this as a daring interpretation, referring to Georg Lukács's famous book *Theory of the Novel*<sup>543</sup>:

when it comes to capturing the duality of duration, [Lukács's thesis on a] four-hundred-page novel appears to be in a far better position than a poem of some twenty-four lines. But this kind of calculation is based on a misconception, for, despite what the word suggests, duration is not a 'long time'. [...] duration is time turned away from its spatialization.<sup>544</sup>

Benjamin's thesis on the relationship between form and the shaping of time in the mourning play are of interest here: time is formed or *shaped*, which is an eminent reference to Bergson's idea of *durée*: in his *Durée et simultanéité*,<sup>545</sup> Bergson writes in his chapter *De la nature du temps* (*On the*

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<sup>541</sup> Henri Bergson, Frédéric Worms, and Arnaud Bouaniche, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, (Quadrige. Grands Textes) (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2007). An earlier version of this text was translated as Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by F.L. Pogson, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1910)

<sup>542</sup> Peter Fenves, *op. cit.*

<sup>543</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel. A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, translated by Anna Bostock, by Merlin Press. For a more detailed account of the links between Lukács and the Frankfurt School, see Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, 'The Scholar, The Intellectual, And The Essay: Weber, Lukács, Adorno, And Postwar Germany,' in *German Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (1997), pp. 217-231; in terms of Lukács' analysis of the modernist work of art, see Peter U. Hohendahl, 'Art Work And Modernity: The Legacy Of Georg Lukács,' in *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of German Studies*, Vol 42, (1987), pp. 33-49

<sup>544</sup> Peter Fenves, *op. cit.*

<sup>545</sup> Henri Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité. À propos de la théorie d'Einstein*, Élie During, and Frédéric Worms (eds.), (Quadrige Grands Textes), (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2009); for an earlier translation, see Henri

*Nature of Time*) that that time and what he terms ‘the continuity of our inner life’<sup>546</sup> do not become intertwined. In the next passage, he crucially explains what this continuity entails, and how it ultimately relates to *duration*:

[Continuity] is that of a flow or a passage, but a flow and a passage which are self-sufficient, a flow which does not implicate a thing that flows and a passage which does not presuppose states that pass by: the *thing* and the *state* are only instants artificially put upon the transition; and this transition, it alone tested naturally, *is the duration itself*.<sup>547</sup>

Time, for Bergson, cannot be seen as an aggregation of individual instants. He continues by comparing duration with a form of memory.

[Duration] is memory, but not personal memory, outside that which it retains, distinct from a past which it assures to conserve; it is a memory belonging to change itself, a memory which prolongs the before into the after and blocks them from being pure instants which appear and disappear in a present which would be reborn without end.<sup>548</sup>

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Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity with Reference to Einstein's Theory*, translated by Leon Jacobson, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1965)

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Henri Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité*, Frédéric Worms (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. ‘Il n’est pas douteux que le temps ne se confonde d’abord pour nous avec la continuité de notre vie intérieure. Qu’est-ce que cette continuité? Celle d’un écoulement ou d’un passage, mais d’un écoulement et d’un passage qui se suffisent à eux-mêmes, écoulement n’impliquant pas une chose qui coule et le passage ne présupposant pas des états par lesquels on passe: la *chose* et l’état ne sont que des instantanés artificiellement pris sur la transition; et cette transition, seule naturellement expérimentée, *est la durée même*.’

<sup>548</sup> Henri Bergson, *op. cit.*, ‘Elle est mémoire, mais non pas mémoire personnelle, extérieure à ce qu’elle retient, distincte d’un passé dont elle assurerait la conservation; c’est une mémoire intérieure au changement lui-même, mémoire qui prolonge l’avant dans l’après et les empêche d’être de purs instantanés apparaissant et disparaissant dans un présent qui renaîtrait sans cesse. Une mélodie que nous écoutons les yeux fermés, en ne pensant qu’à elle, est tout près de ce temps qui est la fluidité même de notre vie intérieure; mais elle a encore trop de qualités, trop de détermination, et il faudrait effacer d’abord la différence entre les sons, puis abolir les caractères distinctifs du son lui-même, n’en retenir que la continuation de ce qui précède dans ce qui suit et la transition ininterrompue, **multiplicité sans divisibilité** et **succession sans séparation**, pour retrouver enfin le temps fondamental. Telle est la durée immédiatement perçue, sans laquelle nous n’aurions aucune idée du temps.’

Bergson continues his exploration of the concept of duration with a musical analogy:

A melody which we hear with our eyes closed, thinking of nothing else, approaches [this concept of] time which is the fluidity itself of our interior life; but it still has too many qualities, too much determination, and it should for a start erase the difference between the sounds, then abolish the distinctive characters of sound itself, to retain but the continuation of that which precedes it in what follows and the uninterrupted transition, multiplied without divisibility and succession without separation, to eventually find the fundamental time. That is the immediately perceived duration, without which we would have no idea of time.

Bergson argues how time as the flow of duration, ought to be understood like a melody, without the particular intervals and apart from the acoustic reality, simply to achieve a sort of unfolding of *sound as time itself*. This is obviously a transition from an acoustically present melody to an abstract one, which retains only its temporal quality, separated from its spatial characteristics, including rhythm ('multiplied without divisibility') and pauses ('succession without separation'). This form of duration understood as interior, uninterrupted time (the continuous time of our lives) can be seen as separate from the time of things, and Bergson explains how:

How do we move from this interior time to the time of things? We perceive the material world and this perception seems to us, rightly or wrongly, to be both inside and outside of us: on the one hand, it is a state of mind; on the other, it is a superficial film of matter where the [faculty of] feeling and [what is] felt coincide. Each moment of our interior life corresponds in this way with a moment of our body and all the surrounding matter, with which it will be 'simultaneous': this matter seems then to participate in our conscious duration.

For Bergson, this duration is then extended gradually to the whole of the material world which seems to form a complete whole; and what is in the immediate surrounding of our body has a duration which is sympathetic with our own duration, we think it must be the same 'as that



which it surrounds, and so on infinitely.<sup>549</sup> Bergson explains that this is how the idea of a ‘duration of the universe’ was born, ‘i.e. of an impersonal consciousness which would be the hyphen between all the individual consciousnesses, as that between these consciousnesses and the rest of nature.’<sup>550</sup> Rather importantly, Bergson then posits the *sum* of *all* consciousnesses:

This sort of consciousness would grasp within a single perception, instantaneous, multiple events situated at diverse points in space; the simultaneity would precisely be the possibility of one or more events to enter in a unique and instantaneous perception.<sup>551</sup>

This way of constructing reality and interpreting it seems very close to Benjamin’s idea of a constellation, focusing on the construction of it, as well as the way in which seemingly separate events, ideas or ‘matters’ can be understood in relation to one another as one *image*.<sup>552</sup> In such an

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Bergson, *Évolution créatrice, Chapitre 3: De la nature du temps, op. cit.* : ‘Comment passons-nous de ce temps intérieur au temps des choses? Nous percevons le monde matériel, et cette perception nous paraît, à tort ou à raison, être à la fois en nous et hors de nous: par un côté, c’est un état de conscience; par un autre, c’est une pellicule superficielle de matière où coïncideraient le sentant et le senti. À chaque moment de notre vie intérieure correspond ainsi un moment de notre corps, et de toute la matière environnante, qui lui serait ‘simultané’: cette matière semble alors participer de notre durée consciente. Graduellement nous étendons cette durée à l’ensemble du monde matériel, parce que nous n’apercevons aucune raison de la limiter au voisinage immédiat de notre corps: l’univers nous paraît former un seul tout; et si la partie qui est autour de nous dure à notre manière, il doit en être de même, pensons-nous, de celle qui l’entoure elle-même, et ainsi encore indéfiniment. Ainsi naît l’idée d’une Durée de l’univers, c’est à dire d’une conscience impersonnelle qui serait le trait d’union entre toutes les consciences individuelles, comme entre ces consciences et le rest de la nature. **Une telle conscience saisirait dans une seule perception, instantanée, des événements multiples situés en des points divers de l’espace; la simultanéité serait précisément la possibilité pour deux ou plusieurs événements d’entrer dans une perception unique et instantanée.**’ [my stress]

<sup>552</sup> The crux of the analogy, or in other words how the two ideas could be regarded as analogous, lies in the aspect of Bergson’s *total* concept of the sum of all consciousnesses, whereas in Benjamin, the idea of a collective understanding of consciousness rests on the individual perceptions. In Benjamin, the instantaneity of Bergson’s perception and insight are preserved at the cost of a transcendental understanding of what is understood. In my view, and in contrast to Adorno’s perspective, it seems that Benjamin’s critique does indeed mediate between the object and the interpretation. Consciousness comes into play, but not in a way Bergson would have understood it.

image, multiple events would become part of one perception. However, the sum total of all consciousnesses as capable of grasping the totality of nature is a problematic one, which Benjamin criticized in his 'On some Motifs in Baudelaire.'<sup>553</sup> He particularly points to the mutual exclusiveness of consciousness and memory, criticizing Bergson for his abstraction of the historical determination of memory.<sup>554</sup> Writing about Bergson's *Matière et mémoire*,<sup>555</sup> Benjamin argues that it attempts to ground itself in empirical research, with a particular orientation to biology. The title already suggests, for Benjamin, 'that it regards the structure of memory as decisive for the philosophical pattern of experience.'<sup>556</sup> He says that experience 'is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life,' but that it is less the 'product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data.'<sup>557</sup> Benjamin suggest there is a strong reason for Bergson's position, which mediates anxieties of his own time:

It is, however, not at all Bergson's intention to attach any specific historical label to memory. On the contrary, he rejects any historical determination to memory. He thus manages to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolved or, rather, in reaction to which it arose. It was the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, (New York, Schocken, 1968), p. 155-200. See also Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-40 (Cambridge Mass., Belknap, 2003), p. 313-355

<sup>554</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p. 157. See also Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-40 (Cambridge Mass., Belknap, 2003), p. 315

<sup>555</sup> For the most recent critical edition, see Henri Bergson and Camille Riquier, *Matière et Mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Frédéric Worms (ed.), (Quadrige Grands Textes) (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2008); translation in Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (New York, Zone Books, 1988)

<sup>556</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs,' *op. cit.*, p. 315

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>558</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p. 157

Bergson's rejection of any historical determination to memory indicates how the historical conditions determining his own philosophy were eliminated or forgotten. Against this forgetting, Benjamin argues that the technical innovations of modernity, such as the camera and the photograph, had enormous impact on both memory and culture. He sees Bergson's work, in analogy with the vocabulary of photography, as presenting a *snapshot* of his age:

In shutting out this experience the eye perceives an experience of a complementary nature in the form of its spontaneous after-image, as it were. Bergson's philosophy represents an attempt to give the details of this afterimage and to fix it as a permanent record.<sup>559</sup>

In the same fashion as the photograph permanently fixes a transient moment, Bergson's philosophy of time focuses on a contingent image of memory and makes it essential. In this way, the experience of the transitory has, perhaps, become blind to those conditions which underlie its possibility. As I will argue in the next chapters, Bergson figures not only as an object of critique in Benjamin's and Adorno's work, but was highly influential to Morton Feldman.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid., p. 157

<sup>560</sup> See Sebastian Claren, *Neither, op. cit.*, p. 119-120. See also later in this thesis, Chapter 6. Feldman spoke about the confusion of images and the conceptual, referring implicitly to Bergson, in his Darmstadt lecture of 1984.

### The image as constellation

In his book *The Disenchantment of Art* on Walter Benjamin's writings on the philosophy of history, Rainer Rochlitz suggests that each of the *moments* of Benjamin's criticism (he also calls them *visions*), should be considered as significant, as they are related to a virtual philosophical unity that was never formulated as such.<sup>561</sup> He argues that the writers and artists Benjamin considers seem to be linked by an 'intellectual solidarity, defined above all by their shared *rejection* of an order of the world symbolized by totalitarianism.'<sup>562</sup> Notwithstanding the possibility of a more mundane reason for his choices, for Rochlitz Benjamin makes us believe there is such an ideal, which he revealed through the schemata of his interpretations: 'he did not adequately distinguish between the principles of an aesthetics and the considerations of a criticism that, in each case, is indebted to a particular work of art and its context of reception.'<sup>563</sup> The reason for this according to Rochlitz lies in the particular concept of *truth*, which 'obliged him to decipher individual works of art and their context as unforeseeable indexes of doctrinal unity to come,' as Benjamin's theory 'places truth in a dependent role in relation to historical events.'<sup>564</sup> The 'concept' of history, and the critique of universalist theories of history and temporality, can be understood from a number of perspectives, representing aspects of Benjamin's unique philosophical method.

This approach combines historical-materialist theory<sup>565</sup> with the language of a (secular) Jewish mysticism and messianism.<sup>566</sup> Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History* in particular present an

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<sup>561</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *The disenchantment of art : the philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, (New York, Guilford Press, 1996), p. 260

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Although outside the scope of this chapter, an important impetus to the formation of his *Theses* is Benjamin's interest in the politics of his time. They combine the theoretical considerations of historiography with a critique of political praxis - as Tiedemann argues 'it is necessary to have a certain conception of the present that allows one to 'generate' an 'interrelationship between historiography and politics.' (1248). The concept of history was

alternative to continuous and homogenous notions of time, of causal relations between events, of the idea of historical necessity, and also of philosophy as the language of concepts. Concepts and conceptualizations are directly criticized both by Benjamin and Adorno for a number of reasons. They understand concepts as *universals*, and criticized them for absorbing the particularities of phenomena, substituting them with abstracted notions in the process. As an alternative,<sup>567</sup> Benjamin proposes the idea of the *constellation*, outlined in his 'Epistemo-Critical

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therefore meant 'to improve our position in the struggle against fascism.' (697) However, Benjamin criticizes the (social-democratic) politicians of his day who 'betrayed' this cause and historical materialism in the process, by developing a different political praxis, according to Tiedemann (p. 92). The first failure he distinguished in regard to fascism was that 'in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm' [697] and 'which did not adhere to reality but made dogmatic claims' (700). Benjamin's revision of the theory and practice of historical materialism begins therefore with 'criticism of the concept of progress itself' (701), one of the central tenets of nineteenth and twentieth century ideology – the universal, upward movement of 'Spirit' [*Geist*] to its fateful synthesis, in which all tensions in society and history would be resolved.

<sup>566</sup> Benjamin's use of *messianic* theological language harkens back to his time with the Jewish youth movement, before WWI. According to Anson Rabinbach, there was a growing awareness and 'recasting' within the generation of 1914 of their Jewish identity, which rejected the assimilationist stance of their parents. These Jews within the youth movement combined an 'esoteric' intellectualism' with 'a certain kind of intellectuality as politics.' See Anson Rabinbach, 'Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch, and Modern German Jewish messianism,' in *New German Critique*, Vol. 34, (Winter 1985), p.80, 82, as quoted by John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, (Cornell, Ithaca, 1993), p. 66-67. McCole also argues, in seeming agreement with Tiedemann, that the theological motifs in Benjamin's work played an important role in his intellectual economy: 'Messianic language provided him with a resistant and resilient idiom rather than an inventory of fixed concepts. In forging a new orientation he had no coherent body of specific doctrines to draw on; he was not simply shifting his allegiances to an alternative, given tradition. Instead the messianic idiom became one of the germs of what we might call an intellectual project or strategy – a radical but immanent critique of German idealism whose essential coordinates were already latent in his involvement in the youth movement. ' McCole, John, idem, p. 67. For more on his involvement and criticism of the youth movement, see J. McCole, 'Benjamin and the Idea of Youth, in *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, (Ithaca, Cornell, 1993), p. 35-70

<sup>567</sup> In an early essay titled 'Das Leben der Studenten und Trauerspiel und Tragödie' [The Life of Students and Mourning Play and Tragedy], Benjamin criticises precisely the presentation of the 'endless task' [*unendliche Aufgabe*] and with it the ideology of progress in the endlessness of time. In it he criticised what Werner Hamacher calls the 'definition of the messianic realm as the *metaphysical structure* of history.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Life of Students,' in *Selected Writings*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 37

Introduction' of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.<sup>568</sup> Adorno immediately saw the potential of this theory of philosophical *truth* for his own work. In 'The Actuality of Philosophy'<sup>569</sup> and 'The Idea of Natural History,' some of these ideas are further explored – ideas, here, are unlike concepts neither generalizations nor subjective reconstructions, but are the phenomena's objective virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation.<sup>570</sup>

To return to this idea of the constellation mentioned above, as a way of presenting and interpreting diverse elements in one plane, another aspect of temporality is explained by Richard Wolin in his essay 'Benjamin, Adorno, Surrealism.'<sup>571</sup> He argues that by regrouping material elements of phenomena – the objects of knowledge – in a philosophically informed constellation, Benjamin 'sought the emergence of an 'Idea' through which the redemption of the phenomena would be effectuated – insofar as contact with the Idea would facilitate their elevation to the homeland of unconditioned truth.'<sup>572</sup> Conceptual knowledge has a strictly limited role to play in this procedure, as Wolin argues: 'its sole task is to facilitate the *arrangement* of the phenomena or material element in the constellation.'<sup>573</sup> However, the ultimate goal of such an arrangement is not simply to conceive these phenomena together, but to interpret them. The ideas do not emerge by juxtaposing the material elements in a montage-like fashion alone. Strictly speaking, as Wolin avers, it is not a result achieved by 'employing the traditional philosophical means of

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<sup>568</sup> Walter Benjamin, and J. Osborne, *The origin of German tragic drama*, (London, NLB, 1977)

<sup>569</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, and B. O'Connor, *The Adorno Reader*, (Blackwell readers) (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000)

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>571</sup> Richard Wolin, 'Benjamin, Adorno, Surrealism,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, (Studies in contemporary German social thought), (Cambridge, Mass, The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 93-122

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., p. 97

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., pp. 97-98

induction, deduction, or logical argumentation.<sup>574</sup> Benjamin's method insists much more on a 'momentary epiphany, a sudden burst of insight,'<sup>575</sup> which he later referred to as the *dialectical image*.

### **The dialectical image: the fleeting moment arrested?**

What is this dialectical image precisely then? For Benjamin,

The dialectical image is a flashing image. Thus, the past must be grasped as an image that flashes in the now of recognition. Redemption, which is accomplished in this way and only in this way, can be attained only as that which in the next instant is already irredeemably lost.<sup>576</sup>

The particular concept of temporality behind the dialectical image is the *Jetztzeit*, as Richard Wolin writes:

As a *Jetztzeit* or 'now-time,' the constellation or dialectical image approximates the Neo-platonic-theological notion of *nunc stans*. This is defined by Franz Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption*, a work which influenced Benjamin, and signifies that 'mankind is redeemed from the transience of the moment,' and the latter is 'refashioned as the ever-persisting and thus the intransient, as eternity.'<sup>577</sup>

For Wolin, the central issue is the distinction between historical time, which is prone to decay and disintegration [*Verfall*] and the notion of messianic time, a time of permanent fulfilment. He traces its legacy in Benjamin's work from the short essay mentioned above of 1916 'Trauerspiel und Tragödie,' and the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in which Benjamin speaks of the *Jetztzeit* as shot through with chips of Messianic time, in contraposition to the empty and degraded 'homogeneous' time of the historical era.<sup>578</sup> If one keeps in mind that for Benjamin this

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p. 98

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

is a philosophy, though interwoven with theological language. Wolin argues that this form of philosophical language, remains ‘unlike the Platonic doctrine, *this-worldly* in origin.’<sup>579</sup>

This means that they emerge ‘spontaneously’ from the conceptually mediated arrangement of the phenomena themselves.<sup>580</sup> Crucially, for Wolin, Benjamin’s theory denies ideas ‘an existence independent of phenomenal being.’<sup>581</sup> The relationship between ideas and phenomena, is expressed in the following metaphor: ‘Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.’<sup>582</sup> This is perhaps the most succinct way in which to express the central thesis of Benjamin’s philosophy. As Wolin avers, ‘neither ideas nor constellations exist independently of the materials elements that constitute them, but instead first emerge therefrom.’<sup>583</sup>

Benjamin’s analysis of the relationship between formal aspects of the dramatic forms, one fixed, closed and unified (tragedy) and one open, non-unified in its elements (*Trauerspiel*), relates these forms with their transformation of historical time into respectively dramatic time and musical time. In other words, for Benjamin these dramatic forms can be understood from the point of view of temporal unfolding, with on the one hand a unity of time and place versus a sequence of events more akin to dream time.

A connection appears then, between formal/*informel* artworks and their particular unfolding of time, one which shows suggestive parallels with Adorno’s interpretation of Gustav Mahler’s music – especially in his essay on Mahler in *Quasi una Fantasia* – where he defends Mahler from

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Cited in Richard Wolin, *op. cit.*, p. 99

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., p. 99



his contemporary detractors.<sup>584</sup> Specifically, he points to the fact that Mahler's 'indifference to the norms of a fastidious musical culture, or rather rebellion against them, dominates both the form of the individual detail and the strategy of the entire work.'<sup>585</sup> For Adorno, 'traditional formulae' still hold sway in Mahler's music, but they 'are disavowed by the concrete shape they are given. It is not merely that the proportions of the parts within the movements are incompatible with the traditional meaning of the overall scheme. The very fibre of the music contradicts the meaning of the formal categories.'<sup>586</sup>

As with the structure of the *Trauerspiel*, whose constituent parts do not follow the traditional schema of the tragedy, 'this means that the listener who is accustomed to listening for the prescribed formal patterns sometimes receives an impression of chaos.'<sup>587</sup> It is here, in a reference to Mahler's First Symphony, that the link with Benjamin's concept of the non-unified form becomes clear:

Against all art, its aim is to transform art into an arena for the invasion of an absolute. Mahler's music shakes the foundations of a self-assured aesthetic order in which an infinity is enclosed within a finite totality. It knows moments of breakthrough, of collapse, of episodes which make themselves autonomous, and finally, of disintegration into centrifugal complexes.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler*, in *Quasi una Fantasia*, *op. cit.*, p. 81-110

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. Adorno also refers the 'fibre' of Mahler's music later in the collection, when he contrasts Berg's music with the banal in Mahler's music: 'The role of tonal complexes in Berg is comparable to the discontinuous characterizations of the banal in Mahler, with whom Berg has so much in common – both in tone, in the approach, in the very fibre of his utterances, as indeed in the conception of entire structures.' See 'Berg's Discoveries in Compositional Practice,' in *Quasi una Fantasia*, *op. cit.*, p. 181

<sup>587</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler*, *op. cit.*, p. 84

<sup>588</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, *op. cit.*, p. 85

In formal terms it is ‘recklessly advanced,’ though harmonically, melodically and colouristically ‘downright conservative’<sup>589</sup> in comparison to the music of composers like Richard Strauss or Max Reger. To Adorno, this points to an aesthetic of discontinuity – ‘the musical non-identity with whatever stands behind it.’<sup>590</sup> He clearly distinguishes between Mahler’s approach and the ‘tragic metaphysics’ of Richard Wagner when he writes that after the ‘Eighth Symphony the experience of metaphysical negativity entered Mahler’s consciousness.’<sup>591</sup> This meant that music fails at confirming meaning in the ‘ways of the world,’ in the way Wagner’s music had attempted to create a ‘tragic’ metaphysics.<sup>592</sup> What Adorno means is that Mahler’s attempt to grasp and unify the way in which reality is structured in music – in discontinuity – is no longer possible, even with Mahler’s attempt to integrate diverse material in terms of the symphony as a genre. For Adorno the normative aspect of the symphony as a genre operates analogously to the way in which concepts are used: they impose abstractions onto what is a very diverse material, be it musical material, or the world of objects. In order to comprehend this, I will now explore Benjamin and Adorno’s critique of philosophy as the language of concepts. The hardening of concepts, in the same way that musical forms are reified, is at the core of Adorno’s critique:

Concepts, whose substrate is historically passed by, were thoroughly and penetratingly criticized even in the specifically philosophical area as dogmatic hypostases.<sup>593</sup>

Adorno refers to the elimination of the concept’s historical origins and further transformations – certain concepts acquire different meanings throughout the ages – as well as the fact that they are ultimately dogmatic constructions and abstractions, which by default reduce reality to reified

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. See also Theodor W. Adorno and Anthony Barone, ‘On the Score of “Parsifal”,’ in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (August 1995), pp. 385

<sup>593</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, translation altered.

concepts. For Adorno, in the process of defining a concept, something is lost – the non-reducible or *non-identical*. This fits in with his critique of the reification of consciousness. In this view, conceptualization and the fetishization of concepts<sup>594</sup> are steps in a process of the domination of nature.<sup>595</sup> Adorno even speaks of the ‘disenchantment of the concept’<sup>596</sup> in his introduction to *Negative Dialectics*. He pleads the case for the understanding of the concept as mediated by the non-conceptual, not only abstracted and reified:

That the concept is a concept even when it deals with the existent, hardly changes the fact that it is for its part enmeshed in a non-conceptual whole against which it seals itself off solely through its reification, which indeed created it as a concept.<sup>597</sup>

It is in opposition to this ongoing reduction, reification and exclusion of the non-identical that he situates the image.

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<sup>594</sup> Adorno, warns for the dangers of what he calls the ‘fetishism of concepts’. This fetishism refers to the notion that concepts tend to be used as abstractions, unaware of their inherently historical and social dimensions. See Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 73

<sup>595</sup> See Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16

<sup>596</sup> See ‘Disenchantment of the Concept,’ *op. cit.*, p. 23-24

<sup>597</sup> Redmond’s translation, *Introduction*

## The Image of the Angel of History

The particular way in which Benjamin gives form to his critique of conceptual reification draws on the idea of the image. He famously proposed the image of the Angel of History as an example, referring to Paul Klee's *Angelus novus*, a work Benjamin owned.<sup>598</sup> For Benjamin the Angel represents history, 'as an image that can only be stared at,'<sup>599</sup> while the observer is forced to silence and can make out none of the details. According to Tiedemann, Benjamin referred to this horror [*das Grauen*] in a note probably written before 1920, in which he writes that with it language in the broadest sense would 'fall away' and 'mankind would find itself dependent on "imitation," on mimesis.'<sup>600</sup> Particularly, philosophical language is criticized as the language of concepts, while images, unlike concepts, gain access to *mimesis* - which had been neglected by philosophy since Aristotle. As Tiedemann points out, it was Kant who

was aware that as he worked to overcome the heterogeneity of pure concepts of understanding with "empirical intuitions, indeed sensible intuitions in general"<sup>601</sup> through a schematism: the abstract language of conceptuality would virtually make amends through an abstraction at a higher level.<sup>602</sup>

In its opposition to a conceptual way of understanding, however, the risk of working with images is their propensity for ambiguous interpretation. Benjamin's image of history here takes sides with the oppressed and the dead, who have been as helpless in history as they are unable to shape the future. This image is hidden behind the interpretation of the image mentioned above,

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<sup>598</sup> See Gershom Scholem, and Rolf Tiedemann, *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel. Vierzehn Aufsätze und kleine Beiträge*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1983); Massimo Cacciari and Paul Klee, *L'angelo necessario*. (Milano, Adelphi, 1986); translated by Massimo Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994)

<sup>599</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, 'Concept, Image, Name: On Adorno's Utopia of Knowledge,' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaat, *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essay in Adorno's Aesthetics*, (Cambridge, Mass., The Mit Press, 1997), pp. 123-146

<sup>600</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Über das Grauen,' Theodor W. Adorno's Benjamin-Archive, Frankfurt, MS 807 (unpublished). Cited by Rolf Tiedemann, *ibid.*

<sup>601</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.), Vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, Insel, 1956), p. 187. Cited by Rolf Tiedemann, *ibid.*

<sup>602</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *ibid.*

i.e. Klee's painting called *Angelus novus*. In his interpretation of the painting, Benjamin forms an 'image' in writing, quoting from a poem by his friend Gershom Scholem, *Angelic Greetings*:

My wing is ready to fly

*I would rather turn back*

For had I stayed mortal time

I would have had little luck.

It is important to quote at length from this passage by Benjamin, as it contains both a number of ideas about the painting itself, as well as forming a model for the way in which other artworks may be *read*:

There is a painting [*Bild*] by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause [*verweilen*: a reference to Goethe's *Faust*] for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm.<sup>603</sup>

Benjamin used interpretations of the painting as a composite for several ideas, ultimately presented as the Angel of History<sup>604</sup> in the theses 'On the Concept of History.' According to Gershom Scholem, the Angel could be seen as representing the Biblical *Mal'ach*, one of the messengers from Paradise, who had the double duty to stand before the Lord and sing his praise,

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<sup>603</sup> Translation by D. Redmond.

<sup>604</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 74

as well as messengers to mankind, ‘interpreting his face, so that they might understand it.’<sup>605</sup> For Benjamin, the Angelus Novus fails in this mission to mankind. The Angel seems to be unable to avert his gaze from the wreckage of history piled up at his feet, but this is ‘how humanity experiences the horror of its own history.’<sup>606</sup> ‘If anything still propels humanity onward, it is the memory of the lost Paradise. This utopian strength is an *impulse* which has not yet expired.’<sup>607</sup> According to Tiedemann, ‘religion has done much to preserve this, especially Judaism’ and this impulse ‘has found its way into philosophy in general and even lives on in the Marxian hope of an empire of freedom,’<sup>608</sup> but only as impulse, a promise which does not fetishize what it promises. However, ‘the storm blowing from paradise’ becomes ‘what we call progress’, again a critique of any concept of progress that makes dogmatic or universalist claims. As the scholar Susan Buck-Morss adds, this is in the first place a direct critique of the view of history as continuous and accessible, a tradition represented by the German historian Leopold von Ranke, who famously claimed to write history ‘as it actually was.’<sup>609</sup>

Seemingly inspired by Scholem’s verses preceding this thesis, the Angel’s back is turned towards the future, so that he cannot see anything. What has happened previously is positioned before

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<sup>605</sup> Gershom Scholem

<sup>606</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 74

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, p. 79n and p. 218: ‘Benjamin described his method, which, it must be said, strained the traditional conceptions of both history and philosophy to the breaking point. It broke radically with the philosophical canon by searching for truth in the ‘garbage heap’ of modern history, the ‘rags, the trash,’ the ruins of commodity production, that were thoroughly tainted with the philosophically debased qualities of empirical specificity, shifting meanings, and above all, transiency: “A final abandonment of the concept of ‘timeless truth’ is in order. “The truth will not run away from us’ [...]. Herewith is expressed the concept of truth from which these representations decisively break.” As a reconstruction of the past, Benjamin’s method ran roughshod over von Ranke’s sacrosanct principle of showing the matter ‘as it actually was’: such history had been ‘the strongest narcotic of the nineteenth century.’

the Angel's eyes, an image which is rather similarly presented to that of the historian as a 'backwards turned prophet', the subject of the seventh Thesis. As Kia Lindroos points out, however, 'the question was about the identifying nature of historiography and its implications for the concept of History. Here the angel does not represent any appearance that can be identified with. On the contrary, it is an alienating figure, who does not perceive of history as following any course.'<sup>610</sup> According to Tiedemann, this fact refers simply to the 'theological prohibition of images and, their profane adaptation: Marx's refusal to describe communist society in detail.'<sup>611</sup> For all his passivity, Benjamin's angel sees more than others do, and in greater detail: 'Where *we* perceive a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe'<sup>612</sup> – from which he is about to move away. However, the debris goes along with the angel, whilst it keeps piling up at his feet – or in Couzens-Hoy's words: 'it does not contain the continuity and coherence of a narrative that would allow us to think of ourselves as approaching a *telos*.'<sup>613</sup> As Lindroos further argues, this critique of progress – a storm which in a Christian, *teleological* sense is 'intended to carry the Christian people to paradise'<sup>614</sup> – achieves the opposite – and 'drives people away from the promised land.'<sup>615</sup> In a more prosaic sense, the 'wind blows with the same force as the idea of progress that detaches people from their present and immediate experiences.'<sup>616</sup> In other words, the concept of progress is just another alienating device in the arsenal of ideology, which, by definition confounds culture (here as history) and nature. Benjamin's critique of progress

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<sup>610</sup> Kia Lindroos, *Non-time, image-space : temporalization of politics in Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history and art*, (Jyva SoPhi, University of Jyva, 1998), p. 80-81

<sup>611</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 75

<sup>612</sup> Walter Benjamin, GS I, p. 697

<sup>613</sup> David Couzens-Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, (Cambridge Mass, The MIT Press, 2009), p. 156

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

specifies the catastrophe of history not as ‘waiting in front (*bevorstehend*)’, but as already given (*jeweils gegeben*)<sup>617</sup> which is further combined with August Strindberg’s conception of hell: ‘Hell is not what is to come, but [this] life here.’<sup>618</sup>

Benjamin’s critique combines elements from Jewish thought – the idea of progress as *catastrophe* – with a critique of Marx’s utopianism and creates an image of the modern era, in which the continuous understanding of history and the persistent idea of progress merge together into the repetitive time of hell of the present: ‘The ‘modern’ [is] the time of hell.’<sup>619</sup> For Couzens-Hoy the storm, or ‘[...] the wind is temporality as such. [...]’<sup>620</sup> In this sense, one could speak of a directionless directionality of temporality: ‘Temporality, or time as experienced, is directional even if it has no particular direction or telos.’<sup>621</sup> It could therefore be distinguished from, for instance, Heidegger’s account of ‘projection’ as ‘consciously and resolutely positing a telos.’<sup>622</sup> In contrast to this view, Benjamin’s critique avers ‘that what we really see is not purpose and meaning in our lives, but contingency and confabulation.’<sup>623</sup> Furthermore, according to Tiedemann, Benjamin’s theses ‘provide a clear enough contrast between the criticized representative of historicism and the historical materialist ‘who is schooled in Marx’ and who ‘always has the class struggle [...] in view.’<sup>624</sup> The critique of ‘false continuity only applies to the

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> ‘Die Hölle ist nichts, was uns bevorstunde sondern dieses Leben hier,’ Benjamin, GS VII.2, p. 676, see also GS I, p. 683. As quoted by Kia Lindroos, *op. cit.*, p. 81

<sup>619</sup> ‘Das ‘Moderne’ die Zeit der Hölle,’ in Benjamin, *Passagenwerk*, p. 676, as quoted by Kia Lindroos, *op. cit.*, p. 81

<sup>620</sup> David Couzens-Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, (Cambridge Mass, The MIT Press, 2009), p. 156

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., p. 157

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., p. 154

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., p. 154

<sup>624</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 694



former,' while for Benjamin, the Angel sees more 'correctly' than *historicism*: because his view is that of the historical *materialist*, as Benjamin understands it.

In order to grasp fully how the Angel of History understands *more correctly*, it is necessary, according to Lieven De Caeter<sup>625</sup> to take into account Benjamin's central notion of *contemplation*,<sup>626</sup> where it appears as observation [*Beobachtung*]; later it can be understood as reflection [*Betrachtung*, also *Anschauung*], attentiveness [*Aufmerksamkeit*], as *vita contemplativa* and especially as immersion, absorption [*Versenkung*]. Sometimes it is disguised in other terms such as idleness [*Müßiggang*] and study [*Studium*]. There seems to be a tension between rather passive and more active interpretations of this motif – observation versus actively grasping an idea. In thesis XVII, contemplation is described as follows: "Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts but also their standstill [*Stillstellung*]."<sup>627</sup> For De Caeter, contemplation is linked here with the notion of redemption. In their *zero-hour* or bringing to a standstill of thoughts (in English the expression 'stop thinking' is misleading, what is meant is a sort of grasping of a thought, while at the same time, as thoughts are volatile, they resist this 'fixing'), a historical event crystallizes into a monad, which the historian can grasp as the

sign of a messianic zero-hour [*Stillstellung*] of events, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the struggle for the suppressed past. He perceives it, in order to explode a specific epoch out of the homogenous course of history; thus exploding a specific life out of the epoch, or a specific work out of the life-work.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Lieven De Caeter, *De Dwerf in de Schaakautomaat. Benjamins Verborgen Leer*, (Nijmegen, SUN, 1999), p. 190

<sup>626</sup> Lieven De Caeter, *op. cit.*, p. 171-196. 'Contemplation' is the central motif in Benjamin's dissertation, '*Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik*'

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*

### Standstill, contemplation, language

Benjamin's ninth thesis on the philosophy of history presents an image in which time, traditionally understood as dynamic movement, comes to a standstill – the angel is caught in a state of 'frozen restlessness' [*erstarrte Unruhe*].<sup>629</sup> In his *Progress* essay, Adorno presents many variations on this idea of the standstill of the whole and the progress within – which ultimately lead him to present his interpretation of the dialectical image:

Everything within the whole progresses: only the whole itself to this day does not progress. [...] Only one *nota bene* could be added to the sum of its intuition: that this whole stands still in its movement, that it knows nothing beyond itself, for it is not the divine absolute, but rather its opposite rendered unfamiliar by thought.<sup>630</sup>

Adorno ultimately tries to *rescue* progress from itself as a bourgeois ideological device. Analogously, Kia Lindroos reads Benjamin's ninth *Thesis* as a form of redemption of progress for *scientific* ends. She argues that Benjamin's critique of progress is not absolute, but that he creates a new 'temporal space'<sup>631</sup> in his examination of the idea. For her, Benjamin's critique of the idea of progress, as we have seen before, criticizes the concept as moving linearly, towards eternity; in this regard, Benjamin explains that scientific progress may still be possible, if it 'describes the first step towards a "better understanding" of any researched phenomena.'<sup>632</sup> Lindroos explains that 'better' is not to be understood as an 'evaluative concept based on cumulative knowledge of an object.'<sup>633</sup> Crucially, she avers that instead 'it signifies a change in perspective, or a new approach to the object.'<sup>634</sup> Within the framework of a critical theory of *history*, the concept of progress, she argues, 'should restrict itself to only interpreting the short time-span between an

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<sup>629</sup> Kia Lindroos, *op. cit.*, p. 82, quotes Benjamin, *Passagenwerk*, p. 414

<sup>630</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Progress*, in *Critical Models*, *op. cit.*, p. 149

<sup>631</sup> Kia Lindroos, *op. cit.*, p. 82

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*

event and its occurrence, and the moments in which it opens a perspective towards something “new.”<sup>635</sup> In an implicit reference to Bergson, and Benjamin’s critique of the former’s theory of continuous time, she continues her argument by stating that ‘the possibility of distinguishing an historical event from the continuum of time and approaching it from a new perspective, is based on an understanding of events as existing independently from each other.’<sup>636</sup> The image here can be seen as allowing a temporal interpretation, which ‘becomes the means of forming the way in which these events are seen as related to each other.’<sup>637</sup> She concludes that

the value of an event is not included in the progressive character of an event in relation to other events, but it is valued in itself, as purely singular. This modifies Leibniz’s idea of the monad, used in various parts of Benjamin’s work.<sup>638</sup>

To return to the idea of *contemplation*, Benjamin refers to a form of Jewish prayer called *Tikkun*, ‘reversal,’ to stimulate the repair of the broken unity after the breakage of the cosmic vessels.<sup>639</sup> The relation between this form of contemplation-as-prayer, an attempt at bringing about this reversal, and history, is implicitly presented as ‘attentiveness’ in the ninth thesis:

He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed.<sup>640</sup>

This pause [*Verweilen*], insists on its attention to the possibility of redemption - or as Benjamin calls it in an early, fragmentary text ‘Arten des Wissen,’ ‘redemptive knowing’<sup>641</sup> This redemptive

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 188; See Gershom Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*, (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 300

<sup>640</sup> Benjamin, *Theses*, p. 249

<sup>641</sup> ca. 1921, as quoted by De Cauter, p. 189-190

knowing is a more active form of contemplation and is to be understood in opposition to knowledge of truth. Although the reference to the *Tikkun* is apparent – the ‘topoi’ of attentiveness as prayer and study function as a call for reversal, however, according to De Cauter, this knowing is affirmed as redemption. Redemptive knowing, then, exists as ‘the knowing [*Wissen*] with which redemption becomes conscious and is thus exacted through it.’<sup>642</sup> However, at the same time as affirming this knowing as redemption, it is restricted as to its ‘magic power’: ‘This exists not, however, as the type of knowing that brings redemption closer.’<sup>643</sup> For De Cauter, the idea formulated in 1921 that redemption is exacted by ‘this dawning of consciousness,’ can further illuminate the later *Theses* in which Benjamin writes that

the historian sees the sign of the standstill of history in the standstill of thought: redemption is not an event that lies in the future, but is time and time again generated by and in knowing itself, as a reviewing and rethinking of the past.<sup>644</sup>

The historian mentioned in the image of the Angel of History in the ninth thesis is an allegory of history as ‘natural’ history,<sup>645</sup> although the angel is a part of this image. He stands for the *true* historian, the historical materialist who has stripped himself of all illusions about human history. In order to use the ‘*weak* messianic power’ bestowed upon us ‘like every generation that precedes us,’<sup>646</sup> we must perceive history as historical materialists – not in Marx’s sense, but in the sense of Benjamin’s ninth thesis: history as a catastrophic pile of debris that continually ‘grows skyward.’

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<sup>642</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Arten des Wissen,’ GS VI, p. 48

<sup>643</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 190

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>645</sup> ‘Natural history’ is one of the types of history for Benjamin. For an explanation, see Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*

<sup>646</sup> Walter Benjamin, GS I, p. 693-694. ‘Die Vergangenheit führt einen heimlichen Index mit, durch den sie auf die Erlösung verwiesen wird. Streift denn nicht uns selber ein Hauch der Luft, die um die Früheren gewesen ist? [...] Ist dem so, dann besteht eine geheime Verabredung zwischen den gewesenen Geschlechtern und unserem. Dann sind wir auf der Erde erwartet worden. **Dann ist uns wie jedem Geschlecht, das vor uns war, eine schwache messianische Kraft mitgegeben, an welche die Vergangenheit Anspruch hat.** Billig ist dieser Anspruch nicht abzufertigen. Der historische Materialist weiß darum.’

For De Cauter, historical materialism *understands* – according to the previous thesis – the ‘claim’<sup>647</sup> implicit in accepting this power.

It may well appear in the angel-thesis that this claim cannot be honoured. But to magically transform it into an ‘objective redeeming presence’<sup>648</sup> almost amounts to mockery of the dead who make this claim.

The angel in the ninth thesis by no means represents the Messiah. This is unmistakably audible in the sentence, “The angel *would like to stay*, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.”<sup>649</sup>

Especially in theses II and XVII, Benjamin cedes this motif – the truly messianic aspect of the *Tikkun* – to the historian for whom he means to pave the way in the *Theses* as a whole. This supports the conclusion that Benjamin indeed intended the angel to stand for the historical materialist.<sup>650</sup> The ‘Messiah’ – immobilized in time<sup>651</sup> – in Benjamin's *Theses* constitutes a model for philosophical thought, ‘capable of breaking the illusion of continuity, which founds the hope of seeing the proletariat, at the centre of the continuum of history of its repression, end this repression.’<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> Walter Benjamin, GS I, p. 694

<sup>648</sup> This is a criticism of Kaiser.

<sup>649</sup> Walter Benjamin, GSI, p. 697 [author's italics]. Cited in De Cauter, *op cit.*, p. 76

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., p. 76

<sup>651</sup> Jimenez, p. 198

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., p. 198

## Conclusion

It becomes clear from the debate about Benjamin's conception of the image, that it constitutes a critical form of reading artworks, including literary texts, paintings and various other media. The pertinent question at this point is: how does the dialectical image as Benjamin conceived it (and Adorno adopted it) allow for the musical artwork? And secondly, is there such a thing as a *musical* image, potentially closing the loop of the non-conceptual of the work (as an image) with Benjamin's dialectical image? Before answering these questions I introduce one author, Laurence D. Berman, who argues that it is possible to define a musical image. However, as I will argue his *archetypal* theorization of such a concept, falls dramatically short in comparison with the dialectics of Benjamin and Adorno's aesthetics. In the next Chapter, I will explore these tensions, especially the idea of a non-archetypal understanding of the object, as well as a *reading* of objects as dialectical images.

### [Coda]: The musical image and a theory of archetypes: a critique

The American scholar and pianist Laurence D. Berman asks what we are to understand an image to be in the strictly *musical* sense:

To begin to answer that question, we must first acknowledge the initial barrier certain readers have to cross in widening their hitherto exclusively visual idea of a concept to include the world of sound. Image ordinarily connotes something impinging on the eye. And – with specific reference to music – there is a hallowed Romantic tradition (still alive, moreover) which holds that music, having transcended the realm of words and pictures, is thus “non-imagistic art” par excellence.<sup>653</sup>

He argues that there are precedents, nevertheless, of applying the term ‘image’ to ‘sound experience’, referring to Ferdinand de Saussure’s ‘original designation of the signifier as ‘sound image,’ and the philosopher Susanne Langer’s use of the term in *Philosophy in a New Key*.<sup>654</sup> Berman contends that music, unlike the visual arts and literature ‘cannot describe or represent subject matter.’<sup>655</sup> However, subject matters as such – stories of heroes in literature or Madonnas in painting – are images, not contents.<sup>656</sup> The musical image, then, is ‘a shape made out of tones and rhythms, just as a visual image like the Madonna is made out of line, colour, mass, and a literary image like the story of Oedipus is made out of words.’<sup>657</sup> Berman argues against this identification of the image with what he calls units of musical syntax, such as motives, phrases, periods, sections, and the like. He states that ‘when the same musical shape takes on the status of an image, we think of it as ‘possessed of’ or expressing a content.’<sup>658</sup> He argues that what has changed ‘is not the musical shape itself but our conception of it; if it seems to us to resonate

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<sup>653</sup> Laurence D. Berman, *The Musical Image : A Theory of Content*, (Westport, Conn.; London, Greenwood Press, 1993), p. 19

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

with the heightened significance – to carry an element of the world beyond pure form – we feel that it has become more than a motive or a phrase and we give it the name image.<sup>659</sup>

Theoretically, Berman bases his conception of the image on Herman Northrop Frye's theory of the archetype, who in his *Anatomy of Criticism*<sup>660</sup> holds the key he believes 'to getting past this inexorable question of musical aesthetics.'<sup>661</sup> how it is possible 'to demonstrate in a genuinely rational way the existence of something that is merely (however strongly) felt?' He reinterprets Frye's literary method in musical terms, particularly drawing on the latter's conception of the archetype: 'The great appeal of archetypal thinking is in its ability to show how individual images, beyond the borders of a single artwork, relate to each other: a host of images from different artworks are seen to fall together into a class.'<sup>662</sup> Frye's conception of the archetype is set apart from Plato's and Jung's universalist conceptions, which, according to Berman, situated the archetype 'before time' or 'belonging to all time.'<sup>663</sup>

It is precisely against this operation of subsuming the particular work under categories, in this case the proto-universal category of the image (Frye and Berman) as possessing archetypal qualities, that Peter Bürger<sup>664</sup> interprets Adorno's *sociology* of music.<sup>665</sup> It can be argued, with

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Herman Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957)

<sup>661</sup> Laurence Berman, p. 22

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid. 'With Plato, the archetypes correspond to those original Ideas, those Ideal Forms, of which the world of physical appearances gives us at best the dimmest apprehension, and true knowledge of which can be obtained only by way of philosophy. What Plato predicates as totally exterior to ourselves Jung views as totally inward – a product of the "collective unconscious," an element inherent in the mind process of the human race as a whole.'

<sup>664</sup> Peter Bürger, 'Das Vermittlungsproblem in der Kunstsoziologie Adornos,' in Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke (eds.), *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 169-185



Bürger and Adorno, that Berman's approach fails to overcome the dichotomy of content and form. Instead of the opposition of form and content [*Inhalt*], Adorno argues instead 'for an opposition between material and artistic practice, of objective predetermined [material] and subjective involvement with it.'<sup>666</sup> What is needed is a theory of the image which allows for the specificity of the individual work's image-like quality, their mediation of a specific material in their technique, and the rationalization of it as technique, in order to read them dialectically as images.

However, in the development of such a theory, a further element of critique will now be discussed: the way in which history is written, especially in its nineteenth-century form of universal historiography. Benjamin and Adorno reject such a notion, which is based on the fundamental understanding of time as continuous, linear, progressive and teleological. These aspects of the critique of traditional historiography are mediated in Adorno's aesthetics, which criticizes notions of unmediated continuity between the world and its representation in artworks, including musical ones.

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<sup>665</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie. Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1962); translated by E.B. Ashton, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, (New York, Seabury Press, 1976); see also Thomas Müller, *Die Musiksoziologie Theodor W. Adornos: Ein Modell ihrer Interpretation am Beispiel Alban Bergs*, (Frankfurt; New York, Campus, 1990)

<sup>666</sup> Peter Bürger, *op. cit.*, p. 170



## **CHAPTER 4: Towards a Language of the Sound-Object**



## Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to reconceptualise the sound-object in the light of Benjamin's *natural language of objects*. In order to allow an expansion of the potential utility of the *dialectical image* to explicate the *(in)formel* musical artworks, a return to Benjamin's conceptualization of the object is required. In particular, three elements in this theory are central to this inquiry:

- (i) the reconsideration of objects as *not-fully-subjectivized*;
- (ii) their potential for non-static, non-reified spatiality as *objects-in-motion*; and,
- (iii) the notion of *montage* of objects (as seen in surrealist technique).

These issues have major implications for the temporal dimension of the avant-garde musical artwork, both at the level of the work and as experienced – especially as they have a direct bearing on our re-conceptualization of the *sound-object*. Together, they form a theoretical framework for the study of musical works, further drawing on the concept of the *dialectical image*. The argument unfolds in three parts. Firstly, I consider Benjamin's conception of a language of objects, which he terms a *natural* language (as opposed to mere *linguistic* language).<sup>667</sup> In order to grasp how Benjamin (and by extension, Adorno)<sup>668</sup> understood the nature of the object, it is necessary to re-examine Benjamin's concept of *language*, as it is fundamental to understanding the issue of *content*. Benjamin (and Adorno) critique the bourgeois conceptualization of *linguistic* language as reifying: the naïve belief that words are true representations of objects. As Benjamin

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<sup>667</sup> The difference between the two is Benjamin's own and may surprise the contemporary philosopher of language, who would understand linguistic language precisely as a natural language, as opposed to artificial languages such as computer languages.

<sup>668</sup> Adorno draws a distinction between 'objects in art and objects in empirical reality.' See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 335. I will claim that to understand this difference, which is problematic, Benjamin's theory of objects is a necessary step towards grasping Adorno's position.

shows, this is not only illusory but also actively misleading. To avoid the pitfalls of this (naïve) ‘naming’ of objects, Benjamin posits the idea of a language of objects in which ‘content’ (as Adorno would call it) is revealed. The critique of linguistic language (the language of ‘man’), in the sense that language *reifies*, which means that the link to the objects we name is lost – and hence language becomes totally reified. Crucially, Benjamin and Adorno plead for a dialectic between *Erlebnis/Erfahrung* (respectively the isolated, ephemeral experience of things, and long experience) and *Erkenntnis* (knowledge/cognition).<sup>669</sup> As a countermeasure in the battle against the reifying tendency of language, Benjamin uses concepts and expressions borrowed from theology; as well as the notion of the dialectical image. I will argue that Lieven De Cauter makes a crucial observation: although Benjamin uses theological language (with roots in Jewish mysticism, as I have argued in Chapter 3),<sup>670</sup> he does not employ these concepts in a theological framework: it remains materialist.

In addition to the earlier conceptualization of the allegorical image, which attempts to crystallize historical moments in time in a new constellation, the individual moments are nonetheless rationalized in their *presentation*. Benjamin argues that ‘allegory,’ as seen from a naïve bourgeois point of view, signals the advent of modern subjectivity in the sense that they are no longer about magic or ritual functioning. An important new point in the interpreting the meaning of these objects, rather than merely naively naming them, is the claim that an alternative can be found in the concept of *interpretation*. As mentioned above, this entails reading the objects *immanently*—i.e. on their own terms. A second important concept, as I have already argued in

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<sup>669</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, p. 333; see also p. 183 and 198 footnote 68 in the same volume.

<sup>670</sup> See also Walter Benjamin, ‘Theological-Political Fragment,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp. 305-306

case of the dialectical image, is Benjamin's concept of *translation*.<sup>671</sup> To read immanently, then, means that the mute language of objects (as understood in its own terms) requires translation into the *sonic*: 'linguistic language.' This, as I will argue, translates the nameless into the name.<sup>672</sup>

Adorno employs the concept of translation in the context of his consideration of traditional forms versus the modernist approach to form. He shows that although they are functional in their original traditional conceptualizations, they have become hardened *schemata* and, in the same sense of the bourgeois concept of language, they have become illusory.<sup>673</sup> Adorno argues that new music rebels against this illusion; this rebellion would be active through their form. To properly understand the modernist work of art, one must approach it in the same way, through *reading* and *interpretation* (in Benjamin's view, a form of contemplation), resulting in a *translation*. It is the task of the philosopher (and in our case, the musicologist) to translate the (non-conceptual) 'language' of these musical works; crucially, a connection exists between the language of objects and the language of *music*. Shierry Nicholson, amongst others, points out in this regard that *mimesis* is active in the work of art. The work of art is mimetic because it imitates *nature*: art is a translation of nature into this language of the art object (and hence constitutes another aspect of the mediation).

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<sup>671</sup> See the following two articles in particular Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 1, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), pp. 253-263; and Walter Benjamin, 'Translation – For and Against,' in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 3., (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), pp. 249-252

<sup>672</sup> This line of inquiry has already been explored by, amongst others, Eric L. Krakauer, *The Disposition of the Subject. Reading Adorno's Dialectic of Technology*, (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 162

<sup>673</sup> Krakauer writes in this regard about one possible way of avoiding this type of naming: 'To reach, or adequately name, means, for now, to refuse to try to reach or adequately name and thereby to insist on the impossibility of doing so. This insistence on alienation preserves, for Adorno, a negative hope that alienation might one day be truly overcome, and not just masked or technologically conjured away. Only such alienating naming reminds that no reconciliation is possible for now.' Eric L. Krakauer, *The Disposition of the Subject. Reading Adorno's Dialectic of Technology*, (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 161

In a second part I consider the *art object*. For this part of the chapter, I have drawn on the work of Claudia Brodsky on the object in Benjamin and Adorno.<sup>674</sup> Adorno conceives of the art object as not being static, but as *becoming*.<sup>675</sup> To understand this, one is reminded of the ephemeral nature of experience, and the quest for knowledge: phenomena, for Benjamin, need to be mediated in ideas for them to endure. The idea in this understanding is much like a constellation bringing these stars into a *configuration* that at once groups them and yet holds them in suspense; this relationship – whilst still reifying to some extent – does not sever all links with the phenomena (to become the feared ‘hardened’ concept). This configuration or *mediation* of the phenomena in the work of art is sedimented historical and social phenomena,<sup>676</sup> and can be seen as not only originating in Benjamin’s oeuvre, but constitutive in Adorno’s aesthetic writings as *configurational form*.<sup>677</sup> Furthermore, for Adorno, whilst the art object imitates nature, nature itself is already mediated.<sup>678</sup>

In the third part of this argument, I revisit the dialectical image, building on the work by authors including Susan Buck-Morss and Margaret Cohen, amongst others. They show the various facets

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<sup>674</sup> Claudia Brodsky, ‘Framing the Sensuous: Objecthood and “Objectivity,”’ in J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno*, (The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, Vol. 3), (New York, Fordham University Press, 2012), pp. 69-115

<sup>675</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>676</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 335 for a succinct view of this matter: ‘It is false to arrive at aesthetic realism from the premise of philosophical materialism. Certainly, art, as a form of knowledge, implies knowledge of reality, and there is no reality that is not social. Thus truth content and social content are mediated, although art’s truth content transcends the knowledge of reality as what exists. Art becomes social knowledge by grasping the essence, not by endlessly talking about it, illustrating it, or somehow imitating it.’

<sup>677</sup> See Shierry Weber Nicholzen, ‘Toward a More Adequate Reception of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*: Configurational Form in Adorno’s Aesthetic Writings,’ in *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 18 (Spring, 1991), pp. 33-64

<sup>678</sup> For a book-length study on Adorno’s concept of nature, see Martin Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991); whilst particular to Adorno, an affinity for a concept of nature as second nature can be found in Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996)



of the dialectical image, respectively presenting its roots in Benjamin's work on the nineteenth century, to the import of Freudian elements in his theory.

In the last part of this chapter, I refer to Borio and his notion of the *sound object*, considering it as a special category of the object in the Benjaminian understanding of it, as on *object-in-motion*. It is my argument that the *sound object* can be reconsidered in this in order to establish a critical link with the music under consideration in the second part of this thesis. I will show how the flaw in *musique informelle* can be remedied if we consider the formal and temporal aspect of these compositions. The sound object will draw on this concept of *object-in-motion*, and the insights gleaned from Benjamin's study of allegorical and dialectical images. Of great importance in this regard is to understand this as the establishment of a *dialectical* concept. This means that that it mediates between the theory of historical time and natural language on the one hand, and the repertoire under discussion on the other hand. It will become clear how the immanent reading of the object – given the difference in conceptions of compositional technical terminology – it is nonetheless necessary to keep these concerns of Benjamin and Adorno in mind. The sound-object has the potential to be part of a process that includes a certain level of formalization as well as the use of the technique of *montage* – in the case of all three composers. At the same time the sound-object can retain the crucial element of temporal and philosophical *motion* (as 'becoming'). The object in this sense combines with the notion of the dialectical image, becoming a strategy for reading these musical artworks immanently. The dialectical image retains the dialectical tension between the object and the viewer and listener; but at the same time it bridges from ephemeral experience into knowledge. To achieve this, the dialectics are momentarily arrested. This is not simply an interpretative tool in a hermeneutic sense, but it potentially reveals something *objectively*, as the written account of this particular experience of musical temporality. The image can finally be understood as dialectical, as it maintains a relation

to the individual compositions. The temporal and spatial distance is then bridged momentarily: object and account come together in a non-reifying constellation as a dialectical image. This image of the modernist work of art in its *(in)formel* state reveals itself as a work barely able hold on to a unifying tendency, critically resolving the tension of its utter fragmentation by forming a negative whole. The work of Feldman, Xenakis and Varèse attempts to walk a fine line between what Adorno considered the fraught dialectic of the material, as increasingly reified and submitting to the spatialization of modern consciousness (Bergson), and the pull of the banality of the reified *culture object*.

What does this immanent reading strategy mean in music-analytic terms? The analysis proposed is based on a *formal* analysis of the work, where form is redefined in terms of the changed nature of the material content of the work; in order for this to be feasible, the avant-garde artwork requires a re-conceived, *textural* analytic strategy which adopts a non-reified temporal and spatial strategy, based on the notion of the *sound-object*. This, in turn, will have implications for an aspect of the concept of *musique informelle* that extends its scope, in that the consequences drawn from the temporal-spatial reading may open up the possibility of a non-linear temporal organization as an alternative to Adorno's motivic-thematic thinking, and thereby showing how these particular works present themselves as a different facet of the modernist artwork's demands (via Wellmer).

### Benjamin's theory of a natural language

Apart from the other systematic work on Benjamin's conception of language, art and history, the extensive work by Lieven De Caeter<sup>679</sup> is often overlooked. Crucially, it sheds a light on the links between different areas of Benjamin's thought, especially the correspondences between language and art. Of particular interest are De Caeter's comments on some of the (rare) references to music in Benjamin's work, especially in conjunction with his theory of a *natural language*. Within the framework of this dissertation, the complex relationship of Benjamin with Adorno is contextualized through an account of their debates on a number of concepts, including the notion of *progress* (both in the writing of history and in aesthetics), language and the dialectical image. Apart from the reading of Benjamin's work, in particular, *Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century*<sup>680</sup> – a further trajectory leads from Benjamin's attempts to integrate Freud's theory on the *dream image*, via Adorno's critique of this original conception of the dialectical image,<sup>681</sup> to its redemption in Adorno's later work. Benjamin's formulation at first was concerned with understanding nineteenth-century Paris, according to Margaret Cohen, positing 'the dialectical image as the accurate reconstruction of the material forces producing the nineteenth-century

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<sup>679</sup> Lieven De Caeter, *De dwerg in de schaakautomaat: Benjamins verborgen leer*, (Nijmegen SUN, 1999). This book is based on De Caeter's doctoral dissertation, prepared at the University of Ghent, Belgium. Its thesis runs to a certain degree parallel to Rochlitz's. See Rainer Rochlitz, *The disenchantment of art: the philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. (New York, Guilford Press, 1996)

<sup>680</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol.3; Walter Benjamin, et al., *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972)

<sup>681</sup> See amongst others, Jean-Michel Palmier's work on the dialectical image. In his attempts at exhaustive analysis, Palmier returns to the notion of the dialectical image; concerning the discussions Benjamin and Adorno had in this regard he remarks: 'quant à la structure même de l'image dialectique et qui révèlent leur différences de sensibilité et de méthode.' Jean-Michel Palmier, J.-M., 'Quelques remarques sur la notion et la fonction de l'image dialectique chez Walter Benjamin,' in Jean-Michel Palmier and Florent Perrier, *Walter Benjamin: Le chiffonnier, l'ange et le petit bossu. Esthétique et politique chez Walter Benjamin*, (Collection d'esthétique, Vol. 68), (Paris, Klincksieck, 2006), pp. 777-787

world of dreams.<sup>682</sup> Undoubtedly the central text on Benjamin's Paris Arcades,<sup>683</sup> is Susan Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.<sup>684</sup> In this book, Buck-Morss not only traces the 'spatial' and 'temporal' origins<sup>685</sup> of the unfinished project, through earlier works – especially his *Trauerspiel* and *One Way Street*, his friendships with Gershom Scholem, Adorno and his relationship with Asja Lacis,<sup>686</sup> and places of interest.<sup>687</sup> It is in the Paris Arcades, however, that Benjamin found his central image, as Susan Buck-Morss explains, in relation to

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<sup>682</sup> Margaret Cohen, *Profane illumination : Walter Benjamin and the Paris of surrealist revolution*, (Weimar and now, Vol. 5), (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), p. 47

<sup>683</sup> Walter Benjamin, and Rolf Tiedemann, *The arcades project*. (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999). As Benjamin organized his notes contained in the *Passagen-arbeit* under broad thematic 'Konvoluts', concerning the concept of the dialectical image, see 'Konvolut N' in particular.

<sup>684</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London, The MIT Press, 1989)

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., p. 8. She quotes Benjamin on the meaning of 'origin', not as an *authentic beginning*, but as a 'rhythmic' flow of becoming: 'Origin [*Ursprung*], although a thoroughly historical category, nonetheless has nothing to do with beginnings[...]. The term origin does not mean the process of becoming of that which has emerged, but much more, that which emerges out of the process of becoming and disappearing. The origin stands in the flow of becoming as a whirlpool [...]; its rhythm is apparent only to a double insight.' In Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, GS V, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), (1982), p. 83.

<sup>686</sup> See Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2014). Benjamin also wrote an essay on Naples together with Lacis, see Walter Benjamin, 'Naples,' pp. 414-421

<sup>687</sup> Including Naples, Berlin (where he spent his childhood and youth), Moscow (where he visited A. Lacis, a communist activist, amongst others), Paris, and arcades of these respective cities. See for example his essay on Moscow: Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow,' in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 2, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), pp. 22-46; 'That nothing turns out as intended and expected – this banal expression of the reality of life here asserts itself in each individual case so inviolably and intensely that Russian fatalism becomes comprehensible. If civilising calculation slowly establishes itself in the collective, this will, in the first place complicate matters. [...] A feeling for the value of time, notwithstanding all "rationalization," is not met with even in the capital of Russia.' (p. 31)

Proust's underlying notion of the *mémoire involontaire*, which he developed from a rather personal level of remembering, to one which could span *collective memory* (and tradition)<sup>688</sup>:

he retained the notion that the Arcades project would present collective history as Proust had presented his own – neither 'life as it was', nor even life remembered, but life as it had been 'forgotten.' Like dream images, urban objects, relics of the last century, were hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past. Benjamin's goal was to interpret for his own generation these dream fetishes in which, in fossilized form, history's traces had survived.<sup>689</sup>

The work as a whole would be 'concerned with the [historical] awakening from the nineteenth century', in the same way that Proust's life story begins with 'awakening.'<sup>690</sup> This reference to Proust bridges the gap between the material world of objects and human consciousness:

The covered shopping arcades of the nineteenth century were Benjamin's central image because they were a precise material replica of the internal consciousness – or rather, the *un*consciousness of the dreaming collective. All of the errors of bourgeois consciousness could be found there (commodity fetishism, reification, the world as 'inwardness'), as well as (in fashion, prostitution, gambling) all of its utopian *dreams*.<sup>691</sup>

As a hallmark of the first international style of modern architecture, these arcades represented the 'lived experience of a worldwide, metropolitan generation.'<sup>692</sup> In this sense, the architectural style of the arcades would not only be a material object of study, but one which reaches into the realm of the psychological and sociological of nineteenth century capitalism. This form of

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<sup>688</sup> For a book length study of this notion, see J. McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the antinomies of tradition*, (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1993); see especially Chapter 6, 'Benjamin and Proust: Remembering,' pp. 253-279. It is concerned with Benjamin's writings on Proust as well as the notion of *mémoire involontaire* (*involuntary memory*), the bridge between memory and dream, and the doctrine of memory in Benjamin's later work

<sup>689</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 39

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

interpretation would lead Benjamin precisely to a *reading* of these objects in terms of the images that spring forth from them. As Buck-Morss shows, it was Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* which influenced this interpretation of the material *world-as-image*, however problematic it seemed at first<sup>693</sup>: 'All the visible universe is nothing but a shop of images and signs.'<sup>694</sup>

Benjamin's substantial 1939 essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'<sup>695</sup> brings together an important number of strands in this debate, of central importance to our own argument. Of significance is the way in which they connect between the types of experience at work in this interpretative reading, not only of visual images, but also of works of art. Benjamin explicitly refers to Bergson's dualist theory of temporality as expounded in *Matière et Mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*),<sup>696</sup> leading to a critique of *durée* (duration, as *experienced* time) as essentially *ahistorical*. In a recent article, Claire Bencowe enumerates these issues,<sup>697</sup> elucidating Benjamin's search for an immanent experience of duration – one which is not based in a universal *élan vital*, but in the temporal experience of spatial objects themselves. In his essay, Benjamin argues that the experience of art (in this case, of lyric poetry) is contingent with the *time* in which it is experienced:

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid. p. 178. Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire discovered the allegorical character of his poems, in which the 'fusion of past and present [...] was highly problematic, precisely because of the *discontinuity* of experience to which his new aesthetic sensibility bore witness.'

<sup>694</sup> cited by Benjamin, GS V, p. p. 313,. See Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>695</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Selected writings*, Vol. 4, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press., 1996), pp. 313- 355

<sup>696</sup> Henri Bergson, F. Worms, and C. Riquier, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, (Quadrige Grands textes), (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2008), pp. 14-521. For this dissertation the most recent edition of Bergson's oeuvre was used, as newly introduced and edited by Frédéric Worms. The translation of *Matière et Mémoire* as Henri Bergson, *Matter and memory*, (New York, Zone Books, 1988) is based on the fifth edition of 1908, necessitating a comparative lecture.

<sup>697</sup> Claire Blencowe, *Destroying Duration. The Critical Situation of Bergsonism in Benjamin's Analysis of Modern Experience*, in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2008), pp. 139-158

Since the end of the nineteenth century, philosophy has made a series of attempts to grasp ‘true’ experience as opposed to the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the masses. These efforts are usually classified under the rubric of ‘vitalism’. Their point of departure, understandable enough, has not been the individual’s life in society. Instead they have invoked poetry, or preferably nature – most recently, the age of myths. Dilthey’s book *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* represents one of the earliest efforts, which culminates with Klages and Jung, who made common cause with fascism.<sup>698</sup> Towering above this literature is Bergson’s early monumental work, *Matière et Mémoire*.<sup>699</sup>

In the following passage, Benjamin proposes his own concept of experience, in contrast to Bergson’s (biologically oriented) *Matière et Mémoire*<sup>700</sup>:

As the title suggests, it regards the structure of memory [*Gedächtnis*] as decisive for the philosophical structure of experience [*Erfahrung*]. Experience is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is the product less of facts firmly anchored in memory [*Erinnerung*] than of accumulated and frequently unconscious data that flow together in memory [*Gedächtnis*].<sup>701</sup>

Benjamin’s essay subsequently confronts Proust’s *Remembrance of things Past* with Bergson’s theory, especially in the correspondences of the former’s notions of *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire*

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<sup>698</sup> This critique of Klages and Jung never fully materialized in Benjamin’s work. As Rebecca Cormay argues in this regard, ‘if the the much-trumpeted *Auseinandersetzung* (Benjamin, GS 5.2, p. 1160) with Jung Klages, and company never properly as such transpires (indeed it is tempting to blame Adorno himself as much as anyone for this deferral), it becomes clear that any image of *Urgeschichte* could point only to an ‘origin’ fractured by a retroactivity which would pre-empt all retrieval and thus equally every mutual illumination between past and present is typically characterized as both ‘flashlike’ (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, Convolute N2a,3) and ‘explosive’ (ibid, O056), this is because what is ruptured here is both the immanence of every epoch and the immanence of subjectivity, whether of an individual or of a phantom collectivity hypostatized in Jungian garb.’ Comay, Rebecca, ‘Materialist Mutations of the *Bilderverbot*,’ in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London, New York, Continuum, 2005), p. 55

<sup>699</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 314

<sup>700</sup> See Chapter 1: ‘Of The Selection of Images for Conscious Presentation. What our Body Means and Does,’ in Henri Bergson, *Matter and memory* (New York, Zone Books, 1988), pp. 17-177

<sup>701</sup> ibid., p. 314

*involontaire*. Where the voluntary memory is limited to the ‘promptings of a memory which obeyed the call of conscious attention,’ and thus discontinuous, the involuntary memory is triggered by chance – famously through the experience of (re-)tasting a madeleine biscuit, dipped in a cup of tea, recalling a moment from his youth.<sup>702</sup> Benjamin is critical of the duality of these two separate types of memory and proposes a different understanding of them in light of *collective*, shared historical experiences:

This concept bears the traces of the situation that engendered it; it is part of the inventory of the individual who is isolated in various ways. Where there is experience [*Erfahrung*] in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine in memory [*Gedächtnis*] with material from the collective past. Rituals, with their ceremonies and their festivals (probably nowhere recalled in Proust’s work), kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained available to memory throughout people’s lives. In this way, voluntary memory and involuntary recollection cease to be mutually exclusive.<sup>703</sup>

In order to achieve the sort of experience which does not metastatize experiences into voluntarily recallable instances, Benjamin subsequently takes recourse to Freud’s work, especially with reference to the experience of shocks [*Chockerlebnis*]. At the same time, his work draws on

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<sup>702</sup> In a letter to Adorno, Benjamin further explore this notion, including the forgetting and *mémoire involontaire*. He writes that ‘I do not think that, to give a true account of forgetting one needs to call into question the notion of *mémoire involontaire*. The childhood experience of the taste of the madeleine, which returns involuntarily to Proust’s memory one day, was indeed unconscious. But his first bite of the madeleine would not have been. (Tasting is a conscious act.) Yet this act no doubt does become unconscious to the extent that a taste becomes more familiar. The “tasting again” by the grown man is, of course, conscious.’ Walter Benjamin, ‘Letter to Theodor W. Adorno on Baudelaire, George and Hofmannstahl,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, pp. 413

<sup>703</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316



examples from everyday life, film,<sup>704</sup> and other authors' work, including Paul Valéry, and, of course, Charles Baudelaire.<sup>705</sup>

However, the image as an underlying theoretical notion, is further elaborated by the German philosopher Sigrid Weigel. Her groundbreaking *Body- and Image-Space, Re-reading Walter Benjamin*,<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> He refers to the perception of film as 'perception conditioned by shock [*chockförmige Wahrnehmung*]', Benjamin, op. cit., p. 328

<sup>705</sup> To this list other authors could easily be added. For example, an early review of a performance by Karl Kraus in 1928 could furnish an example of such a shock, as presented in the reading by Kraus of work by Jacques Offenbach: 'Kraus – intentionally, rightly – explodes the framework of the entire evening. Anarchically, he turns directly to the audience during an interval in a brief speech that applies to Berlin the refrain we have just heard: "I bring out the worst in every town." And in so doing he affects his listeners directly, in the same way he does with the texts he reads – that is to say, he assaults them unexpectedly, destructively, disrupting the prepared "mood," attacking the audience where they least anticipate it. In this respect he can only be compared to a puppeteer. It is here, not in the style of the operetta star, that his mimicry and his gestural language have their origin. For the soul of the marionette has entered his hands. None of Offenbach's works fulfills the requirements of opera as completely as *La vie parisienne*; nothing in *La vie parisienne* is as Parisian as the transparent nature than of that nonsensical nightlife through which not the logical but certainly the moral order makes its appearance. Of course, it does not come to judge; it comes as protest and evasion, as cunning and as mollifying gesture: in a word, as music.' Walter Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus reads Offenbach,' in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 2, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), p. 111

<sup>706</sup> Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and image-space : re-reading Walter Benjamin*, (London, Routledge, 1996). Benjamin uses the terms **body space** and **image space** in the Surrealism essay, on interrupting the artist's career (as a raconteur of jokes): 'The jokes he tells will be better for it. And he will tell them better. For in the joke, too, in invective, in misunderstanding, in all cases where an action puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes, the long-sought image space is opened, the world of universal and integral actualities, where the "best room" is missing – the space, in a word, in which political materialism and physical creatureliness share the inner man, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains untorn. Nevertheless – indeed, precisely after such dialectical annihilation – this will still be an **image space** and, more concretely, a **body space**.[...] The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has really transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. For the moment, only Surrealists have understood its present commands.'

focuses on the ‘specific way in which Benjamin thinks and the figurations in which that thinking takes on form.’<sup>707</sup> She stresses the importance of how his

manner of thinking and the manner of writing cannot be seen as separate since they – beyond the dualistic opposition of content and form – come together in a third: namely, in the image, which Benjamin himself referred to as a ‘third’.[...] In an image, however, that in Benjamin’s thought does not have the status of a reproduction (*Abbild*), a ‘mental picture’, or the like, but rather that of a constellation, a heteronomous and heterogeneous similitude, in which figures of thought correlate with those of history or of experience and reality.<sup>708</sup>

Her work, unlike many others, states the centrality of the image in clear terms, and distinguishes between the different meanings of the term, even in Benjamin’s own work.<sup>709</sup> She also makes the link between his ‘thinking-in-images’ which goes beyond metaphor and the aforementioned theory of language clearer, a theory ‘in which magic, myth, and progressive instrumentalization are significantly arranged in relation to one another.’<sup>710</sup>

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See Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,’ in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), Vol. 2, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), p. 217-218

<sup>707</sup> *idem*, p. ix

<sup>708</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>709</sup> Benjamin uses the term ‘image’ [*Bild*] ‘in a whole range of different combinations and contexts, and ultimately his talk of graphic image (*Schriftbild*) and dream image (*Traumbild*), of the images of history (*Bilder der Geschichte*) and the mnemonic image (*Erinnerungsbild*), of thought-images (*Denkbilder*) and dialectical images (*Dialektische Bilder*) has as its basis a concept of images which – aside from the controversy concerning the relation between ‘material and mental image’ – goes back to the original and literal sense of the word: image as likeness, similitude, or resemblance (*Ähnlichkeit*).’ See Sigrid Weigel, *op. cit.*, p. 23, and Chapter 4 in this thesis.

<sup>710</sup> Sigrid Weigel, *op. cit.*, p. 75

### On the relationship between language and music

Several important texts address the relationship between language and music, as on the one hand the *language* of musical *works* and on the other hand the *language-character* of music.<sup>711</sup> Building on insights gleaned clearly from Benjamin's work on language, in another unfinished draft outline of a theory on musical 'reproduction'<sup>712</sup> – or interpretation – Adorno develops key elements, including the concept of the *musical* image (as different from what Adorno calls the *sign*).

Today, the relationship of language and music has become critical. In comparison to signifying language, music is a language of a completely different type. Therein lies music's theological aspect. What music says is a proposition at once distinct and concealed. Its idea is the form [*Gestalt*] of God. It is demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen, the human attempt, futile, as always, to name the name itself, not communicate meanings. [...] Music points to the true language as to a language in which the content itself is revealed, but for this it pays the price of unambiguousness, which has gone over to the signifying languages.<sup>713</sup>

The above quotation comes from Adorno's essay on the relationship between music and language, in which he draws on a theory of language, as *signifying* language on the one hand, and a *pure* language of objects on the other. This theory is strongly inspired by the work of Walter Benjamin, specifically his theory of language, which differs from traditional linguistic theories. The relation between Benjamin's notion of language and Adorno's theory has not been fully

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<sup>711</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Musik, Sprache und ihr Verhältnis im gegenwärtigen Komponieren,' in *Jahresring* 56/57 (Stuttgart, 1956); GS 16 (1978), pp. 649-664; translated by Susan H. Gillespie, 'Music, Language, and Composition,' in *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 401-414; republished in Richard Leppert, *Essays on Music. Theodor W. Adorno*, pp. 113-126

<sup>712</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Draft,' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol 2., translated by Shierry Weber-Nicholsen, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1992); see also Theodor W. Adorno, *Zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion*, Henri Lonitz (ed.), (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2001)

<sup>713</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Music, Language, and Composition,' in *Essays, op. cit.*, p. 114; for a different translation, see also: Adorno, 'Music and language,' in *Quasi una Fantasia*, p. 2

explored.<sup>714</sup> However, in order to *interpret* music (and language) it is necessary to understand the latter's theoretical work on the language of *objects*. In his essay, 'On Language as Such and the Languages of Man', Benjamin outlines a theory of language based on God's creative word – a god who is, however, not located in a divine, transcendent realm outside of the material world. In this material sense, the God or Messiah in this theory gives precedence to the objects themselves. For Benjamin, God's name then is at the same time a necessary and absent term:

The proper name is the communion of man with the creative word of God. (Not the only one, however, man knows a further linguistic communion with God's word.) Through the word, man is bound to the language of things. The human word is the name of things. Hence, it is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them, as agreed by some convention). Language never gives *mere* signs.<sup>715</sup>

As Lieven De Cauter observes in this connection: 'Perhaps Benjamin's alternative, mystic sounding theory is to be construed negatively, and is his use of theology an attempt to escape both extremes of, on the one hand naturality and on the other hand the conventionality of

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<sup>714</sup> See for example Max Paddison's work on the language-character of music. Paddison, whilst exploring the double notion of the language-character of music which acts through mimesis, i.e. musical artworks mimic on the one hand the communicative and on the other hand the conceptual in language, does not mention Benjamin's theory of a silent language of objects. See Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 143-144. For two articles which consider the language-character of music and Adorno's notion of the silent work (again, without mentioning Benjamin), see Max Paddison, 'The language-character of music: some motifs in Adorno,' in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 116, No. 2, (1991), pp. 267-279 and 'Performance and the Silent Work. Mediation and Critical Reflexion in Adorno's Theory of Musical Reproduction,' in *Filigrane Musique, esthétique, sciences, société*. [online], Numéros de la revue, La société dans l'écriture musicale, [27/05/2011], <http://revues.mshparisnord.org/filigrane/index.php?id=147>

<sup>715</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 69

language.<sup>716</sup> Benjamin states that not only is the bourgeois conception of language mistaken when it bases meaning in coincidence or convention, but the mystical theory of language is equally wrong when it identifies words with the nature of objects. According to Benjamin, objects do not have ‘words’ – the language of things is a silent language – theology is then a sort of *tertium (non) datur*.<sup>717</sup> In the fully rationalized world of modern works of art, the ‘language of objects’ – or in Adorno’s words also ‘language of things’ and ‘immediate language’ – is suppressed by the advanced technification, as he argues in *Aesthetic Theory*:

Technique is able to become the opponent of art insofar as art represents – at changing levels – the repressed unmakeable. However, the technologization of art is not synonymous with feasibility either, as the superficiality of cultural conservatism would prefer. Technologization, the extended arm of nature-dominating subject, purges artworks of their immediate language [*unmittelbare Sprache*].<sup>718</sup>

What Adorno means is that technology *alienates* – a Marxian trope – but he also refers, implicitly to the loss of what Benjamin termed the *aura*:

Technological requirements drive out the contingency of the individual who produces the work. The same process that traditionalists scorn as the loss of soul is what makes the artwork in its greatest achievements eloquent rather than merely the testimony of something psychological or human, as the contemporary prattle goes.<sup>719</sup>

In a further step in this argument, Adorno finally turns to Benjamin’s notion of the language of objects, and ties modern art – crucially for my argument – to the language of objects:

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<sup>716</sup> De Cauter quotes Tiedemann, who claims Benjamin refutes both theses. Rolf Tiedemann, in Theodor W. Adorno (introduction) and Rolf Tiedemann (ed.) ‘Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins,’ (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 48

<sup>717</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *De Dwerg in de Schaakautomaat*, (Nijmegen, Sun), p. 117-118; see also Irving Wohlfarth, “Geheime Beziehungen.” Zur Deutsch-Jüdische Spannung bei Walter Benjamin,’ in *Studi Germanici*, Vol. 28, (1990), p. 252-255

<sup>718</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Gretl E. Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann, *Ästhetische Theorie*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970 (1980)), p. 60

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

Radicalized, what is called reification probes for the language of things [*Sprache der Dinge*]. It narrows the distance to the idea of that nature that extirpates the primacy of human meaning. Emphatically modern art breaks out of the sphere of the portrayal of emotions and is transformed into the expression of what no signifying language can achieve. Paul Klee's work is probably the best evidence of this from the recent past, and he was a member of the technologically minded Bauhaus.<sup>720</sup>

Paradoxically, Adorno suggests that it is precisely through increasing reification that objects find their own, wordless language once again. The artworks as objects are ascribed various meanings by human language, which they are unable to resist, and end up divorced from their own reality *as* objects. Benjamin wrote in this regard that 'language communicates the linguistic being of things.'<sup>721</sup> The answer to the question 'what does language communicate?' is therefore 'all language communicates itself.'<sup>722</sup> However, to Benjamin this is not a tautological proposition, because 'that which in a mental entity is communicable *is* its language.'<sup>723</sup> He continues with a first application of this language as the language of *man*:

'The linguistic being of things is their language; this proposition, applied to man, means: the linguistic being of man is his language. Which signifies: man communicates his own mental being *in* his language. However, the language of man speaks in words. Man therefore communicates his own mental being (insofar as it is communicable) by *naming* all other things.'<sup>724</sup>

It is this *naming* which causes the split from the language of things. De Cauter glosses this point as follows:

Name as the heritage of human language therefore vouches for the fact that language as such is the mental being of man; and only for this reason is the mental being of man, alone amongst all mental

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Languages of Man (1916),' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1913-1926*, M.W. Jennings (ed.), (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press), p. 63

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>724</sup> *ibid.*

entities, communicable without residue. On this is founded the difference between human language and the language of things.<sup>725</sup>

The absence of a ‘residue’ points to a theory of human language as a totalizing system once more; language, with ‘man’ as the namer of things then speaks for them, in what Benjamin precisely calls ‘the language of man’<sup>726</sup> – by default forcing all nature to speak subjective language. He can then say that

language, and in it a mental entity in it, only expresses itself purely where it speaks in name – that is, in its universal naming. So in name culminate both the intensive totality of language, as the absolutely communicable mental entity, and the extensive totality of language, as the universally communicating (naming) entity.<sup>727</sup>

Benjamin pleads for a conception of language which rejects both the bourgeois conception – the sign is not arbitrary, and words are bound to the world of things – and the mystical theory – where ‘the word is simply the essence of the thing.’<sup>728</sup> The latter ‘is incorrect because the thing in itself has no word, being created from God’s word and known in its name by a human word.’<sup>729</sup>

As De Cauter shows, Benjamin does not regress into a theological or mystical conception of language. However, language-as-convention is repudiated in as far as it is subjectivizing: ‘language comes before the subject, and therefore also before intersubjectivity.’<sup>730</sup> This is of crucial importance to understand Adorno’s philosophy, as it borrows several of these points. For

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<sup>725</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>726</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>729</sup> De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 69: ‘Misschien is Benjamins alternatieve, mystiek aandoende theorie vooral negatief op te vatten en is het beroep op de theologie een poging om aan beide extremen van enerzijds natuurlijkheid en anderzijds conventionaliteit van de taal te ontkomen.’

<sup>730</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 118 ‘De taal komt voor het subject, en dus ook voor de intersubjectiviteit.’ See also Irving Wolfahrt, ‘Die Willkür der Zeichen. Zu einem sprachphilosophischen Motiv Walter Benjamins,’ in C. Türcke (ed.), *Perspektiven kritischer Theorie. Festschrift für Hermann Schweppenhäuser*, (Lüneburg, 1988), p. 135

example the relation of allegory to modernity, constitutes a signature of modern subjectivity, and therefore a subjectivizing of the objects as described by Benjamin's theory of language.<sup>731</sup> Adorno writes in *Aesthetic theory* about this *allegorical* aspect of artworks, tying it once more to the work of the *informel* painter Wols:

Artworks not only produce *imagines* as something that endures. They become artworks just as much through the destruction of their own *imagerie*; for this reason art is profoundly akin to explosion. [...] Not only are artworks allegories, they are the catastrophic fulfilment of allegories. The shocks inflicted by the most recent artworks are the explosion of their appearance. In them appearance, previously a self-evident apriori of art, dissolves in a catastrophe in which the essence of appearance is for the first time fully revealed: and nowhere perhaps more unequivocally than in Wols' paintings.<sup>732</sup>

In the next, central passage in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno further relates this theory to the artwork, especially when he expounds the transformation process of *artwork* to *image*; also, it is noteworthy that the sort of language-like aspects – for example, the *eloquence* of this objective language – refers to Benjamin's silent language of objects:

Aesthetic images are not fixed, archaic invariants: Artworks become images in that the processes that have congealed in them as objectivity become eloquent. Bourgeois art-religion of Diltheyan provenance confuses *imagerie* of art with its opposite: with the artist's psychological repository of representations. But this repository is itself an element of the raw material forged into the artwork. The latent processes in artworks, which break through in the instant, are their inner historicity, sedimented external history. The binding character of their objectivization as well as the experiences from which they live are collective.<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 85-86

<sup>732</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 84 The reference to Wols is obviously very interesting, and can be seen to link to his essay on *musique informelle*. See Chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis.

<sup>733</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 85-86



Not only is this, for Adorno, the *language* of artworks, but he impresses upon its image-character and collective aspect (of objects having something in common, another implied reference to Benjamin):

The language of artworks is, like every language, constituted by a collective undercurrent, especially in the case of those works popularly stigmatized as lonely and walled up in the ivory tower; the eloquence of their collective substance originates in their image character and not in the ‘testimony’ – as the cliché goes – that they supposedly wish to express directly to the collective.<sup>734</sup>

Language contains the ‘wealth of tradition [*overlevering*], which Benjamin conceives of as revelation – a revelation which unfolds in this tradition, which means in history. It [history] *is* this wealth.’<sup>735</sup> Another scholar, Irving Wohlfarth, however, argues that the conception of language as convention is, a ‘forgetting of the forgetting’ of language as origin.<sup>736</sup> On the contrary, for Benjamin, intersubjectivity precedes language: prattle<sup>737</sup>, over-definition, arbitrariness, even allegory. De Cauter explains:

Allegory, also, is a Fall into the arbitrariness of the sign [of Saussurian linguistics] and Benjamin links it with the advent of modern subjectivity.<sup>738</sup> On the side of the objects, it reinforces reification, the devaluation of things (I, 318, 360), which [refers to] nothing other than the ‘turning away from things’<sup>739</sup> [as presented in] the essay on language. The *mythical* narrative structure of the language essays

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<sup>734</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 85-86

<sup>735</sup> De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p.118 ‘Zij bevat de rijkdom van een overlevering, die Benjamin opvat als openbaring; een openbaring die zich in de overlevering, dat wil zeggen in de geschiedenis ontplooit. Zij *is* die rijkdom.’

<sup>736</sup> Irving Wohlfarth, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Image of Interpretation,’ in *New German Critique*, No. 17 (Spring, 1979)

<sup>737</sup> *Geschwätz* – Benjamin refers to Kierkegaard. See Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 118

<sup>738</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p. 118, footnote 136 ‘Ook de allegorie is een zondeval in de willekeur van het teken en Benjamin verbindt haar met de opkomst van de moderne subjectiviteit. Aan de objectzijde versterkt zij de verdinglijking, de ontwaarding van de dingen (I, 318, 360), die niets anders is dan de afwending van de dingen’ uit het taalopstel. De ‘mythische’ verhaalstructuur van de taalopstellen is een poging om aan het subject, dat de wereld constitueert en zin geeft, te ontkomen; en tegelijk bedt zij ook een kader waarin deze vervreemding in en door de taal – in het spoor van Lukács – kan worden geduid: als signatuur van de moderniteit.’

<sup>739</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 72

are an attempt to evade the subject, which constitutes the world and endows it with meaning; but at the same time it offers a framework within which alienation in and through language – in Lukács' vein – can be interpreted: as signature of modernity.<sup>740</sup>

Adorno hints at this in musical terms in the aforementioned essay on Mahler when he wrote:

[...]by attributing to the traditional words and syntax of music intentions which they no longer possessed, he signalled his recognition of the rupture. The inauthenticity of the language of music becomes the expression of its substance. Mahler's tonal chords, plain and unadorned, are the explosive expressions of the pain felt by the individual subject imprisoned in an alienated society. They are *cryptograms of modernity* [my stress], guardians of the absolute dissonance which after him became the very language of music.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>740</sup> Lieven De Caeter, *op. cit.*, p. 118-119

<sup>741</sup> 'Mahler' in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia : essays on modern music*, (London; New York, Verso, 1992), pp. 85-86. It ought to be clear that for Adorno there is no absolute meaning or signification of elements of musical syntax: chords which once expressed what a contemporaneous audience may have understood as passionate, grief-stricken or melancholic do not necessarily continue denote the same to a different audience (and/or in later times. This illusory obviousness is what Adorno criticizes by attributing the 'pain felt' to chords which used to express (once more, illusory) peaceful existence. The dialectic of musical material then continues by establishing that which used to be dissonant as its mothertongue.

## Music and Language

A further aspect of this dialectic of the material can be found in Adorno's essay 'Music, Language, and Composition,'<sup>742</sup> which delves into the critical situation in which new music and language are engaged. He contends that both language and music require a different interpretative approach – although analogous – along the lines described above:

To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music. Music interpretation is the act of execution [performance] that holds fast to the similarity to language, as synthesis, while at the same time it erases every individual incidence of that similarity. Hence the idea of interpretation belongs to music essentially and is not incidental to it.<sup>743</sup>

Adorno argues for a theory of interpretation which *respects* the object – the musical work – by reading it immanently – on its own terms.

But to play music properly means, above all, to speak its language properly. This language demands works to be imitated, not decoded. It is only in mimetic practice—which may, of course, be sublimated into the unspoken imagination in the manner of reading to oneself—that music discloses itself, never considering the interpretation independent of the act of performance. If one wished to compare the signifying languages with the musical act, it would more likely be the transcription of the text than its comprehension as signification.<sup>744</sup>

This transcription implies a reference to Benjamin's notion of *translation*; the task of the translator, to paraphrase the title of one of his seminal essays,<sup>745</sup> is in the case of music one given to the performer or the reader of the score. However, originally, for Benjamin, translation is so central that it should be founded in any theory of language 'at the deepest level',<sup>746</sup> as 'translation is removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations. Translation

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<sup>742</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Music, Language and Composition,' in *Essays*, pp. 113-133

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115

<sup>744</sup> Adorno, 'Music, Language and Composition,' in *Essays*, p. 115

<sup>745</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 253-263

<sup>746</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 69

passes through continuity of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity.<sup>747</sup>

Translation of the (mute) language of things into the language of man is ‘not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is the translation of the nameless into the name.’<sup>748</sup>

Significantly, this points to Benjamin's understanding of the relation between language and historical time. This means that for Benjamin (as De Cauter reads him, with Giorgio Agamben) language is not a convention between people, but ‘an inheritance, a gift.’<sup>749</sup> In this sense, ‘language is handed down from “pre-history,” it always already comes before history, as language is the origin of history: any historical record/handing-down is based in language. Man is historical because he speaks.’<sup>750</sup> ‘History,’ Benjamin states in *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, ‘arises at the same time with meaning in human language [*Sprache des Menschen*].’<sup>751</sup> For De Cauter, Benjamin chooses ‘the tradition of the language of the Bible in a critical sense – as a different paradigm from the conventional conceptions of language, but ultimately to find out what it says about language.’<sup>752</sup> As De Cauter argues, that ultimately in Benjamin’s theory a language can be found which lacks *signification*,<sup>753</sup> resulting in his idea of a *pure* language. This refers to the messianic, utopian perspective, ‘where language becomes thinkable as freed from its instrumentality, as language in itself, as pure medium [as opposed to language as a “means”].’<sup>754</sup> This pure language can be understood as music, in its form as natural sound. Natural sound here

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid. p. 119

<sup>750</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p 119

<sup>751</sup> Walter Benjamin, GS II, p. 139

<sup>752</sup> Lieven De Cauter, *op. cit.*, p 119

<sup>753</sup> Ibid., p. 123, see Walter Benjamin, ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ GS IV, p. 19; ‘The Task of the Translator,’ *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 260

<sup>754</sup> De Cauter, 123

refers to the language of things, where ‘the lament is the language of nature complaining about too much definition, naming and language as a communicative medium.’<sup>755</sup> According to De Cauter music ‘can be identified with pure language, purified of all mimetic and communicative statement (in favour of the symbolic: language as language).’<sup>756</sup>

In Adorno’s later writings, this conception of a pure language is represented by his musings on the language character of music. In the essay on the relation between music and language,<sup>757</sup> as quoted above, this link with Benjamin’s theory is revealed. In the following passage, the connection between the increasing subjectivism and reification reflects Benjamin’s theory of (Adamic) *naming* of objects, which rationalizes them. Adorno developed the most important element of this theory in these later writings, based on the insights from Benjamin’s work and his own thinking on the subject of language, as a theory of musical *form*. Traditional forms were functional and ‘capable of entering into a particular context. They provided the space for musical specificity just as concepts do for a particular reality, and at the same time, as with language, their abstractness was redeemed by the [socio-historical] context in which they were located.’<sup>758</sup> As I have already argued, this traditional logic of forms has become second nature. In other words, it has become established to the point that they are simple mechanical schemata – an ‘illusion’ in Adorno’s words, against which new music rebels.<sup>759</sup> New music ‘rises up in rebellion against the illusion implicit in such a second nature. It dismisses as mechanical these congealed formulae

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<sup>755</sup> Benjamin, GS II, p. 251

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 113-134

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Music and Language: a Fragment’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia : essays on modern music*, (London ; New York: Verso, 1992) p. 258. Original in Theodor W. Adorno, *Musikalische Schriften. 2. Quasi una fantasia* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 440

and their function.<sup>760</sup> However, new music cannot completely avoid the (human) language – only ‘from its reified version which degrades the particular into a token, into the superannuated signifier of fossilized subjective meanings.’<sup>761</sup> In this sense, Adorno presents his language of [new] music as analogous to Benjamin’s (silent) language of objects, in clear contrast to everyday language:

Subjectivism and reification go together in the sphere of music as elsewhere. But their correlation does not define music’s similarity to language once and for all. In our day, the relationship between music and language has become critical. The *language of music* [my emphasis] is quite different from the language of intentionality.<sup>762</sup>

However, Adorno specifically employs the term *natural language* [*Natursprache*],<sup>763</sup> in ‘On the Social Situation of Music,’<sup>764</sup> where it is used in relation the music of Anton Webern, which he terms *dialectical lyricism*.<sup>765</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> This reference brings to mind Benjamin’s famous image of the (Paris) arcade as a cave, which holds petrified, sedimented history, including the consumer as fossil from a (pre-)industrial past.

<sup>762</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Music and Language: a Fragment,’ in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia : essays on modern music*, (London; New York, Verso, 1992) p. 258

<sup>763</sup> On the topic of nature in terms of Adorno’s work, see Gernot Böhme, *Natürliche Natur. Über Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1992); Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996); and Martin Seel *Eine Ästhetik der Natur*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991)

<sup>764</sup> ‘Zur Gesellschaftliche Lage der Musik (1932),’ in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 18, pp. 729-777; ‘On the Social Situation of Music,’ translated by Wesley V. Blomster and revised by Richard Leppert, *Essays on Music, Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley, Calif.; London, University of California Press, 2002), pp. 391-436

<sup>765</sup> Lyricism, or better, lyrical poetry, is a rather precarious style, which Adorno criticized famously in his statement that lyrical poetry is no longer possible after Auschwitz. Adorno argues that ‘in Webern, loneliness and alienation from society – conditioned in Schoenberg by the formal structure of his work – become thematic and are transformed into content: the declaration of the inexpressible and of total alienation is asserted by every sound of his music. If one were to apply the basic concept of immanent dialectics, which constitutes the foundation of the Schoenberg School, to Webern, one would have to employ a sub-title from Kierkegaard – who is sufficiently close to Webern – and speak of ‘dialectic lyricism.’ In Theodor W. Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation in Music,’ *op. cit.*; see also Sören Kierkegaard, *Fear and trembling*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex; New York, N.Y., Penguin Books,

Adorno explains this new label's meaning, in all its contradictoriness:

For here, the most extremely individual differentiation, a dissolution of the material used which musically goes far beyond Schoenberg and expressively beyond Berg, is employed for no other purpose than this: for the liberation of a type of *natural language of music* [my stress], of pure sound, which Webern denied without fail in the regression to a *natural material* [*Naturmaterial*], to tonality and to the 'natural' overtone relations. To produce the image of nature within historical dialectics: that is the intention of Webern's music and the riddle which it offers. This riddle will be solved [*dechiffriert*] much later.<sup>766</sup>

Although Adorno specifies that the social interpretation of Webern's work presents great difficulty<sup>767</sup> before the above passage, Webern's music is slotted into the polemical debate of the music of the Schoenberg circle as opposed to the objectivity of Stravinsky's music.<sup>768</sup> However, the salient issue here is the reference to a number of ideas presented elsewhere in Adorno's writings, which make an implied reference to Benjamin's philosophy of language, in particular the idea of language as 'natural' language. In this regard, the riddle-like character of artworks<sup>769</sup> – like Webern's generally brief, densely constructed compositions – can only be revealed if its

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Viking Penguin, 1985), and Peter Fenves, 'Image and Chatter: Adorno's Construction of Kierkegaard,' in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22 (Spring 1992), pp. 100-114; on the importance of what the author Robert Kaufman terms *lyric abstraction*, for both Adorno and Benjamin, see Robert Kaufman, 'Aura, Still,' in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London; New York, Continuum, 2005), pp. 125-126

<sup>766</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On The Social Situation of Music (1932),' in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on music: Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley, Calif.; London, University of California Press), pp. 391-436, specifically pp. 402-403; This final phrase sums up the idea of the 'message in a bottle,' one of the key images in Adorno's work, to which he refers on the opening page of *Aesthetic Theory*, in reference to the music of Arnold Schoenberg. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 1

<sup>767</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music,' op. cit., p. 402

<sup>768</sup> For Adorno's critique of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, see Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 264-271. The polemic high point in Adorno's work of the two composers came in *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949) [*Philosophy of New Music*].

<sup>769</sup> The notion of the riddle, even before the artwork-as-riddle, was an early point of interest in Benjamin's work. See Walter Benjamin, 'Riddle and Mystery,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 266-268

material and truth content is 'solved' if we recall Benjamin's method, through critique and commentary (based in the particular form of *contemplation* he proposes). For example, in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*,<sup>770</sup> Benjamin remarks *à propos* of this point:

Critique seeks the truth content of a work of art; commentary its material content. The relation between the two is determined by that basic law of literature according to which the more significant the work, the more inconspicuously and intimately its truth content is bound up with its material content. If therefore, the works that prove enduring are precisely those whose truth is most deeply sunken in their material content, then in the course of this duration, the concrete realities rise up before the eyes of the beholder all the more distinctly the more they die out in the world.<sup>771</sup>

Benjamin's insight into Goethe's text underlies not only Adorno's contemporaneous writings, but continues to echo throughout the latter's late work, as is evident from the critique of Webern's work mentioned above, and, above all, *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>772</sup> Benjamin's text on Goethe continues with a further explanation of the relationship between the two types of content as different from a temporal point of view:

With this, however, to judge by appearances, the material content and the truth content, united at the beginning of the work's history, set themselves apart from each other in the course of its duration, because the truth content always remains to the same extent hidden as the material content comes to the fore. More and more, therefore, the interpretation of what is striking and curious – that is the material content – becomes a prerequisite for any later critic.<sup>773</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe's Elective Affinities,' in *Selected Writings*, pp. 297-360; for a discussion of the relation Benjamin had with the work of Goethe, see especially the second part of the essay by Joanna Hodge, 'The Timing of Elective Affinity: Walter Benjamin's Strong Aesthetics,' in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London, New York, Continuum, 2005), pp. 14-31. In it, Hodge not only relates Benjamin's relation to Goethe, she illuminates their preoccupation with a category of expressionlessness, 'retrieved from the writings of Spinoza,' in light of Kant's philosophy (p. 15)

<sup>771</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Goethes Elective Affinities,' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, p. 297

<sup>772</sup> For examples from *Aesthetic Theory* in support of this claim, see *infra*.

<sup>773</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 297



Benjamin's understanding of artworks as containing not only *historically* mediated material, but also an *objective* truth, is also powerfully present in Adorno's conception of interpretation; interpretation as in a correct execution may intimate the material conditions of society. As an example of how interpretation, as critique and commentary might work, Benjamin talks about the role of the palaeographer, who sits in front of a parchment, on which a faded text

is covered by the lineaments of a more powerful script which refers to that text. As the palaeographer would have to begin by reading the latter script, the critic would have to begin with commentary. And with one stroke, an invaluable criterion springs out for him; only now can he raise the basic question of whether the semblance/luster [*Schein*] of the truth content is due to the material content, or the life of the material to the truth content.<sup>774</sup>

For Benjamin, these two set themselves apart from each other in the work, and as they do so 'they decide on its immortality. In this sense the history of works prepares for their critique, and thus historical distance increases their power.'<sup>775</sup> Further developing this notion of the illusory and the *object-ive* in artworks, the relation between content and what Adorno calls the *semblance character* of artworks,

is immanently mediated by their own objectivity. Once a text, a painting, a musical composition is fixed, the work is factually existent and merely feigns the becoming – the content – that it encompasses; even the most extreme developmental tensions in aesthetic time is to a degree indifferent to empirical time, which it neutralizes.<sup>776</sup>

It is this dialectical tension, between the illusory *becoming* and the hardening of the work as an *object* which motivates Adorno's aesthetics of music; the fruitful moment here lies in the

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<sup>774</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 298

<sup>775</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 298

<sup>776</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 107. This is part of a longer discussion of the work of art as 'tour de force', of 'making the impossible possible', or pretending that a work is not 'made', hiding what Adorno calls its 'facture'. However, this illusory character or semblance paradoxically constitutes the content of the artwork, 'through the form of that semblance.'

admission of the developmental as the problematic (and ultimately untenable) *telos* of his reasoning in this regard, which opens up the potential of a future (spatially aware) music. At the same time as the illusion portends to be a necessary element (to allow the artwork to exist at all), in the modernist musical artwork, it is precisely the *aesthetic time* of the music which attempts to make the listener forget about *experiential time* that constitutes the illusory element; Adorno criticizes it as a form of spatialization, which even his preferred developmental technique cannot escape.

In fact, both Benjamin and Adorno are concerned with the *enigmatic* physiognomy of the work of art, or in the words of Shierry Weber Nicholson:

the enigmatic face of the work of art, the enigmatic gaze it directs at us, that incites this philosophical reflection. The notion of art's enigmatic quality – or its picture-puzzle or rebus-like quality, in an image more familiar from Benjamin's work than Adorno's – is crucial to Adorno's concept of art and is inseparable from the notion of the work of art as mimetic and requiring or inciting mimetic behaviour in the viewer or listener.<sup>777</sup>

In her opinion, it is enigmatic precisely because of its mimetic and 'non-conceptual' [conceptless] character, and because it cannot have a discursive meaning.<sup>778</sup> It was Benjamin's intention to understand works of art – as we have seen in the Goethe essay – by means of an interpretation which reflects on their riddle-like character, whilst at the same time taking a critical distance. However, as Nicholson points out, this distance is absent if the work of art is experienced through 'mimetic assimilation' – as she quotes Adorno: 'When one is inside works of art, re-

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<sup>777</sup> Shierry Weber-Nicholsen, *Exact imagination, late work : on Adorno's Aesthetics*, (Studies in contemporary German social thought), (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1997), p. 150

<sup>778</sup> Ibid. Weber-Nicholsen finishes the paragraph by stating: 'further, it is enigmatic because it lost its purpose when the mimetic migrated from ritual into art; art has become, in Kant's phrase, purposive but without purpose. As Adorno says, art cannot answer the question, 'What are you for?'

enacting them, the enigmatic quality makes itself invisible'<sup>779</sup> and 'the musician who understands his score follows the most minute movements in it, but in a certain sense he does not know what he is playing.'<sup>780</sup>

In the following passage, Adorno employs Benjamin's concept, keeping the latter's insistence on interpretation of the artwork as enigma in mind, as well the potential for revelation – of its historical material and truth content – and its 'mute' language of objects:

If expression were merely a duplicate of subjective feelings, it would not amount to anything. [...] A better model for understanding expression is to think of it not in terms of subjective feelings, but in terms of ordinary things and situations in which historical processes have been sedimented, endowing them with the potential to speak.<sup>781</sup>

It is revealing that works of art, often seen as eternal or universal in their appeal – Beethoven's symphonies, for example – and the formation of a stable canon of great works is implicitly criticized here; it becomes clear that artworks not only live a life of their own – apart from their creator – but are also vulnerable: if, to paraphrase Benjamin, what is striking and curious in its material content loses its critical edge, then they simply may become mere banalities.

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<sup>779</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p 183 [176] as quoted by NicholSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>780</sup> Ibid. In a similar manner, Max Paddison argues that expression can be understood as the tension within the larger context of the rationalization in artworks, which is 'identified by Adorno with construction, as the activity of "shaping" or forming (*Gestaltung*) the material[...] Self-reflection is implied, as opposed to the "blindness" of expression; also technique, rationality (as *ratio*) and objectivity. Mimesis in this context is related to the *miming* of 'inner, subjective feelings in order to bring them to expression, as well as the "mimicking" of bodily gestures,' whilst the latter also have 'objective', socio-cultural and historical significance.' In Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 142

<sup>781</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, GS 7, p. 170, as quoted by Max Paddison, *op. cit.*, p. 142

## The art object

In the following section, the question as to the art object is framed within Adorno's work. The term is both critically used in his philosophy – based on Benjamin's theory of the object – and has huge implications for his aesthetic considerations of music and musical time. Importantly, it allows Adorno to propose his concepts of *becoming* versus *being*, at the level of the *object*. I will further develop this notion of an *object-in-motion* in light of the *sound-object*.

As Claudia Brodsky asks: 'What is an art object? And how do we experience it?'<sup>782</sup> She argues, somewhat unusually, that Adorno's work forms a counterweight to what she terms the 'dissolution of music as a meaningful artistic form'<sup>783</sup> by Hegel's interpretation of romantic music, as, paradoxically, 'first and foremost, affordable art.' In her view it remains 'no less powerfully unclear what in Adorno's, opposed to Hegel's, aesthetic theory defines [as] "object"'.<sup>784</sup> The problem of defining the object in *musical terms* in this regard,

is not merely because music, of all the arts may be the least likely exemplar of objecthood—transitory by nature, fixed only in its notation, inherently available to formal and performative variation—but because Adorno, writing on art in general, resists all exemplary definitions of what constitutes this theoretical object.<sup>785</sup>

Benjamin and Adorno's theories of experience attempt to understand the opposed character of our experiences as fleeting, and knowledge as more lasting. Importantly, this argument attempts to 'frame the sensuous'<sup>786</sup> and centres on what precisely it is that is experienced. The experience

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<sup>782</sup> Claudia Brodsky, 'Framing the Sensuous: Objecthood and "Objectivity,"' in J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno*, (The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, Vol. 3), (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010), p. 74

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., p. 69

of the artwork then, is an experience of an art *object*, which includes the experience of musical works. However, it becomes clear that traditional conceptualizations of the object – including artworks as *static* entities – do not suffice to define these complexly mediated objects, with an implied temporal (and spatial) dimension. For Adorno, artworks, as *objects-in-movement* can be negatively defined in opposition to reified objects, or ‘culture-objects’ (*Kulturobjekte*); the art object in this sense is composed of contradictory *moments*.

Benjamin situated his early work on the philosophy of history as a critique of Kant's concept of the ephemeral nature of experience [*Erfahrung*]. In *Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie*, he diagnosed a basic problem in not only Kant's, but any ‘great theory of knowledge’:

The problem faced by Kantian epistemology, as with every great epistemology, has two sides, and Kant managed to give a valid explanation for only one of them. First of all, there was the question of the certainty of knowledge that is lasting, and, second, there was the question of the integrity of an experience that is transient. For universal philosophical interest is continually directed toward both the timeless validity of knowledge and the certainty of a temporal experience which is regarded as the immediate, if not the only object of that knowledge.<sup>787</sup>

Benjamin searches for a theory of experience that includes both sides of the problem, the ‘lasting certainty of cognition’ [*bleibenden Gewissheit der Erkenntnis*] and the ‘integrity of transitory experiences’ [*Dignität vergänglicher Erfahrung*].<sup>788</sup> The connection between these two is only possible

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<sup>787</sup> Burkhardt Lindner, Thomas Küpper, and Timo Skrandies (eds.), *Benjamin-Handbuch. Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, (Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler, 2006), p. 175. Quoted from *Gesammelte Schriften* II, p. 158

<sup>788</sup> Benjamin's prologue to the *Tranerspiel* book further develops this idea. As Charles Davis writes: ‘In knowledge the subject constructs a world according to its own concepts; in experience the subject constitutes ‘ideas.’ These ideas have an objective structure that, as objective, is determined by the particular phenomena themselves. Despite that contrast between knowledge and experience, knowledge by breaking up reality into its elements does serve to mediate particular phenomena to the ideas. Phenomena do not enter whole into the ideas, but only as conceptually unravelled into their elements. All the same, experience is nonetheless the representation of ideas (*Darstellung der Ideen*) from out of empirical reality itself. See C. Davis, ‘Walter Benjamin, The Mystical Materialist,’

if the ‘singularly temporal [*singulär zeitlich*]<sup>789</sup> structure also becomes the subject of philosophy from the lasting certainty and if the theory of cognition transforms itself into a philosophy of history. What is critical, then, is how both can form an alliance, which does not reduce the experience (including the experience of the unfolding of time) to a simple category or concept.<sup>790</sup>

As Charles Davis contends, this occurs when ‘the particular phenomena themselves, though conceptually mediated, become the ideas.’<sup>791</sup> As Benjamin himself argues, ‘Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. This means in the first place, that they are neither concepts nor their laws. They do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena and in no way can the latter be criteria with which to judge the existence of ideas. The significance of phenomena for ideas is confined to their conceptual elements.’<sup>792</sup> The phenomena, then, are ‘conceptually mediated, are taken up into the ideas’<sup>793</sup> and thus redeemed (*gerettet*).<sup>794</sup> Each idea ‘is self-contained as a monad. But every single monad contains all the others. As a monad, each idea contains the totality and is an image of the world. Nevertheless, each idea differs from every other idea. Ideas are thus discontinuous, each in its own way a complete whole as a monadic image.’<sup>795</sup> Adorno elaborates on this notion of the object as containing congealed history in ‘Thing, Language, History’ in *Negative Dialectics*:

The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is *possibility*—the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one.

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in Solomon Frank, et al., *Truth and compassion : essays on Judaism and religion in memory of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Frank*, (SR supplements, Vol. 12), (Waterloo, Ont., (Canada), Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p. 79

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Walter Benjamin and John Osborne, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (London, NLB, 1977), p. 34, as quoted by Charles Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 80

<sup>793</sup> Charles Davis, *op.cit.*, p. 80

<sup>794</sup> intentionally a religious word, in Davis, p. 80

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

But no matter how hard we try for a linguistic expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without quite bringing itself could to mind; there is a gap between words and the thing they conjure. Hence the residue of arbitrariness and relativity in the choice of words as well as in the presentation as a whole. Benjamin's concepts still tend to an authoritarian concealment of their conceptuality. Concepts alone can achieve what the concept prevents.<sup>796</sup>

Although he criticises Benjamin for seemingly misunderstanding (and abandoning) concepts, he continues by affirming the method of the constellation:

The determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others; this is the font of the only constellations which inherited some of the hope of the name. The language of philosophy approaches that name by denying it. The claim of immediate truth for which it chides the words is almost always the ideology of a positive, existent identity of word and thing. Insistence upon a single word and concept as the iron gate to be unlocked is also a mere moment, though an inalienable one. To be known, the inwardness to which cognition clings in expression always needs its own outwardness as well.<sup>797</sup>

Art objects<sup>798</sup> are not simply objectified for Adorno, although when they are perceived as such, as 'culture-objects', they succumb to 'the fetish of the irrevocability of things in being.'<sup>799</sup> Objects

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<sup>796</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>798</sup> On the difference between the different terms used by Adorno, see Claudia Brodsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-77: 'For, if "art" at present—or, at least, since Duchamp appears to designate an infinite and fragmented field of particulars, none of which can be excluded a priori from, and few of which can rest secure a posteriori in, the name, the immediate difficulty in defining the object of art in Adorno is that "object" in Adorno goes by too many names. [...] While "object" and thing in English obviously overlap with "Objekt" and "Ding" in German, Adorno can and does employ the alternatives to these terms available only in German: "Gegenstand" as well as "Objekt", "Sache" as well as "Ding".[...] Adorno uses them noninterchangeably. [...] If "object" (Gegenstand) is the word Adorno uses instead of "thing" (Ding) to imply the product of an act of objectification that is at once an act of reification [Verdinglichung], and if "object" (Objekt, used more frequently by Adorn, can convey, unlike "object" (Gegenstand)but like "thing" (but Ding, either positive or negative connotations, the derivative terms, "objective" (objektiv) and "objectivity" (Objektivität), gradually shed any such semantic ambivalence in the essay.'

are not static or unchanging, then, but part of the historical dialectic, and *temporal*. As Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics*, with a curious linguistic analogy:

Their becoming fades and dwells within the things; it can no more be stabilised in their concepts than it can be split off from their own results and forgotten. *Similar to this becoming is temporal experience* [my stress]. It is when things in being read as a text of their becoming that idealistic and materialistic dialects touch. But while idealism sees in the inner history of immediacy its vindication as a stage of the concept, materialism makes that inner history the measure, not just the untruth of concepts, but even more of the immediacy in being.<sup>800</sup>

If objects are not to be seen (exclusively) as reified *monads*, they can be seen as *becoming* rather than static *being*. In terms of the artwork, Adorno sees them as historical, and therefore temporally mediated:

The artwork in itself is not, as historicism would have it – as if its history accords simply with its position in real history – Being absolved from Becoming. Rather, as something that exists, the artwork has its own development. What appears in the artwork is its own inner time; the explosion of appearance blasts open the continuity of this inner temporality. The artwork is mediated to real history by its monadological nucleus. History is the content of artworks. To analyze artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them.<sup>801</sup>

From the music of Beethoven, Mahler and Berg to the future *musique informelle*, Adorno imbues them with the notion of a *surpassing* of the handed-down forms, via *disintegration* which is to be realized in the immanence of music itself. In surpassing these handed-down forms, the works of these composers not only indicate the way to a new music, but equally to a new way of understanding musical form in general. This points to the idea of a ‘material theory of form,’ as

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<sup>799</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*

<sup>800</sup> Ibid.

<sup>801</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 118



we have seen *Vers une musique informelle*, *Aesthetic Theory* and the Mahler essay.<sup>802</sup> Contrary to the traditional analysis of music, which never really understands the mediation of the whole by the part in any other way than in postulating a pre-established harmony where every part is abstractly designed as the detail tailored to the whole, the *material theory of forms* differs in its approach. It proposes to deduce all of its formal categories from their meaning in the context of immanent temporalization to the musical work. This theory also wants to assume certain traditional categories as far as they already imply a temporal character, were it not because they were determined by *rules of succession*, by reified categories of stylization, for example, the notion of the period with its constituent elements of *antecedent* and *consequent*.

If the art object is composed of contradictory moments, Adorno's goal is to establish an object-immanent critique which, rather than remaining in 'general knowledge of the servitude of the objective mind [...] seeks to transform this knowledge into the power of the consideration of the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*),<sup>803</sup> in such a way that, 'where it comes across something that does not suffice, does not rapidly ascribe it to the individual and his psychology, the mere cover for failure, but seeks to derive it from the irreconcilable ability of the moments of the object.'<sup>804</sup> To return to the comments made by Claudia Brodsky in this regard,

That an "object" can be made of, can contain, "moments," and that such "moments" rather than any specific content by what compose its "objectivity," like that of "truth," must render such an "object" non-objectifiable in the very manner Hegel rejected as non-aesthetic, that of an "object" that is always changing, and thus not "properly" an art object at all.<sup>805</sup>

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<sup>802</sup> See also Max Paddison, *op. cit.*, p. 149-183

<sup>803</sup> The translation here implies that it is not related to the thing in itself in a Kantian context, which would be *das Ding an sich*.

<sup>804</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I*, in GS 10.1, (1977), p. 27

<sup>805</sup> Claudia Brodsky, *op. cit.*, p. 80

Furthermore, it is the broken link between a metaphysics and the experience of objects which underpins Benjamin's critique of Kant; a further problem with the latter's theory is precisely its inability to *open up* this realm of metaphysics,

because it contains within itself the primitive elements of an unproductive metaphysics which excludes all others. In epistemology every metaphysical element is the germ of a disease that expresses itself in the separation of knowledge from the realm of experience in its full freedom and depth.[...] There is – and here lies the historical seed of the approaching philosophy – a most intimate connection between that experience, the deeper exploration of which could never lead to metaphysical truths, and that theory of knowledge, which was not yet able to determine sufficiently the logical place of metaphysical research.<sup>806</sup>

Benjamin searches for a 'non-metaphysical metaphysics',<sup>807</sup> which tries 'to make the phenomenal world yield noumenal experience.'<sup>808</sup> His interpretative skills as a literary critic – concerned with particular texts – can be understood as fundamental for his non-conceptual, anti-idealist *reading*. This approach, as I have shown, culminates in the notion of the dialectical image, in which the interpretation of (mundane) objects,<sup>809</sup> as well as works of art, lead to the rearrangement of their contradictory elements in constellations, aimed at releasing new meanings.

However, before I turn to a consideration the nature of the images of artworks themselves (and indeed, the experience of artworks *as* images), a final consideration of the dialectical tension between cognition [*Erkenntnis*] and experience in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and his writings on

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<sup>806</sup> Walter Benjamin, et al., *Selected writings*, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press., 1996), p. 103

<sup>807</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics : Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*, (New York, Free Press, 1977), p. 93, as quoted by Charles Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 80; For a study of Benjamin's approach to metaphysics, see Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003)

<sup>808</sup> Charles Davis, *ibid.*

<sup>809</sup> For examples of these images, Benjamin's *Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century* studies everything from the scraps gathered by the ragman to the advertisements in the windows of the Paris arcades.

music is required – in order to understand the connection with Benjamin's work in this regard. Especially in the draft introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno draws attention to the mutually *necessary relationship* between knowing and experiencing:

Lived experiences are indispensable, but they are no final court of aesthetic knowledge. Precisely those elements of art that cannot be taken immediately in possession and are not reducible to the subject require consciousness and therefore philosophy. It inheres in all aesthetic experience to the extent that it is not barbarically alien to art. Art awaits its own explanation. It is achieved methodically through the confrontation of historical categories and elements of aesthetic theory with artistic experience, which correct one another reciprocally.<sup>810</sup>

For Adorno, what is important is not a solid canon of great works – to be preserved a-historically as a perfect set of *monuments* – whilst at the same time not to be discarded 'in favour of the putative immediacy of artistic experience.'<sup>811</sup> In other words, for Adorno, philosophy – understood here as the consciousness of art – is implicitly already present in artistic experience. Or in an even clearer incarnation: art does not simply exist as experienced by people, but it comes with its own language. It is this language which corresponds closely to the 'language of objects' Benjamin referred to in *On Language as such and on the Language of Man*.<sup>812</sup>

In conclusion, Adorno's conceptualization of the artwork is not simply focused on artworks-as-objects, albeit objects-in-movement, but also to the *experience* of them. Following Benjamin, Adorno's theory of experience attempts to grasp the fleetingness of the moments of experience, and gaining knowledge from these experiences, without reducing the objects to reified things. In other words, *against* a transcendental or pragmatist theory of experience, the experience Adorno

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<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,' in *Selected Writings, op. cit.*, Vol. 1

and Benjamin are interested in keeps the relation between object and observer ‘open.’ It is in this regard that Claudia Brodsky observes:

Adorno's aesthetic theory, while related by the dialectic to objects, unlike Kant's, alters, no less than does Kant's critical analytic of aesthetic “judgement,” how it is we conceive the aesthetic object we spontaneously perceive. For Adorno such an object is conceived “objectively,” not as it is but in its “moments,” moments perceptible only by “the mind,” itself in “movement.” Yet for this to happen—for an object to be perceived as “moments” of the object—the immediate sensory reality of the aesthetic must be separated from its object identification: this, and not the destruction of the sensory, is the real violence of “theory.”<sup>813</sup>

As I have shown, Adorno’s theory draws heavily on Benjamin’s critique of Kant and the ‘naming’ of the object which in Benjamin’s eyes was akin to a subjectivization of them, whilst for Adorno this naming does not condemn the named object *entirely*. At the same time Adorno’s aesthetics articulates the dangers of reification, both of the object (as ‘culture-object’) and the mind (as reified consciousness). Brodsky implicitly refers to these influences – respectively of Benjamin and Bergson – when she writes:

Finally for perceived moments to be further perceived as the “movement” of the object rather than the mind alone, the sensory must be maintained while being perceived to change, given no objective identity but the identity of objecthood, of being and remaining some “thing” outside the subject. The sensory must be perceived “objectively” received at each “moment” as never before, for it to appear to move independently of the subject, to move as if “through” the mind of its own, and the basis for such a perception of the senseless—not in itself, as if such perception were possible, or in its identity as an object (both equal grist for ideology)—is not sensuousness itself but abstraction.<sup>814</sup>

The object-immanent critique is therefore a necessary analysis of this interaction, which is temporarily brought to a standstill in the moment Benjamin calls a dialectical image. The

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<sup>813</sup> Claudia Brodsky, *ibid.*

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82

dialectical image therefore can be understood as precisely a theoretical attempt at linking *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis/Erfahrung*: understanding the fleeting experience of the artwork whilst conceiving of this as knowledge without destroying the original object as a mere static thing.

### The dialectical image: history, interpretation and further considerations

I have argued, with a number of scholars, including Susan Buck Morss, Shierry Weber Nicholson, Rolf Tiedemann, Lieven De Cauter and many others, that the complex relationship of Benjamin and Adorno, both personal and in their work, can be contextualized through an account of their debates on a number of concepts, including the notion of *progress* (both in the writing of history and in aesthetics) and language. However, another key concept in this extraordinary exchange of ideas consists of Benjamin's concept of the *dialectical image*. Apart from the reading of Benjamin's work, in particular, *Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century*<sup>815</sup> – a trajectory leads from Benjamin's attempts to integrate Freud's theory's on the dream image, via Adorno's critique of this original conception of the dialectical image,<sup>816</sup> to its redemption in Adorno's later work. Benjamin's formulation at first was concerned with understanding nineteenth century Paris, according to Margaret Cohen, positing 'the dialectical image as the accurate reconstruction of the material forces producing the nineteenth-century world of dreams.'<sup>817</sup> Undoubtedly the central text on the Benjamin's Paris Arcades,<sup>818</sup> is Susan Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.<sup>819</sup> In this book, Buck-Morss not only traces the 'spatial' and 'temporal' origins<sup>820</sup> of

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<sup>815</sup> Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999); Walter Benjamin, et al., *Das Passagenwerk*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1982)

<sup>816</sup> Jean-Michel Palmier, in all his attempts at exhaustive analysis, returns to the notion of the dialectical image, and the discussions Benjamin and Adorno had, 'quant à la structure même de l'image dialectique et qui révèlent leur différences de sensibilité et de méthode.' Palmier, J.-M., 'Quelques remarques sur la notion et la fonction de l'image dialectique chez Walter Benjamin,' in *op. cit.*, p. 777-787

<sup>817</sup> Margaret Cohen, *Profane illumination : Walter Benjamin and the Paris of surrealist revolution*, (Weimar and now, Vol. 5), (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), p. 47

<sup>818</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999). Benjamin organized his notes contained in the *Arcades Project* under broad thematic headings named 'Convolutés', concerning the concept of the dialectical image, see 'Convolute N' in particular.

<sup>819</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London, MIT Press, 1989)

the unfinished project, through earlier works – especially his *Trauerspiel* and *One Way Street* – his friendships with Gershom Scholem,<sup>821</sup> Adorno and his relationship with A. Lascis,<sup>822</sup> and places of interest.<sup>823</sup> It is in the Paris Arcades, however, that Benjamin found his central image, as Buck-Morss explains, in relation to Proust's underlying notion of the *mémoire involontaire*, which he developed from a rather personal level of remembering, to one which could span collective memory (and tradition).<sup>824</sup> As Susan Buck-Morss explains, Benjamin

[...] retained the notion that the Arcades project would present collective history as Proust had presented his own – not 'life as it was', nor even life remembered, but life as it had been 'forgotten.' Like dream images, urban objects, relics of the last century, were hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past. Benjamin's goal was to interpret for his own generation these dream fetishes in which, in fossilized form, history's traces had survived.<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>820</sup> Ibid., p. 8. She quotes Benjamin on the meaning of 'origin', not as an authentic beginning, but as a 'rhythmic' flow of becoming: 'Origin [*Ursprung*], although a thoroughly historical category, nonetheless has nothing to do with beginnings [...]. The term origin does not mean the process of becoming of that which has emerged, but much more, that which emerges out of the process of becoming and disappearing. The origin stands in the flow of becoming as a whirlpool [...]; its rhythm is apparent only to a double insight.' In Walter Benjamin, GS V: *Das Passagenwerk* ed. R. Tiedemann, 1982, p. 83

<sup>821</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*. (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1975); translated by Harry Zohn, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship*, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981)

<sup>822</sup> His friendships with Theodor W. Adorno, G. Scholem and relationship with A. Lascis are of note. See Susan Buck-Morss, *ibid.* and Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2014)

<sup>823</sup> Including Naples, Berlin (where he spent his childhood and youth), Moscow (where he visited A. Lascis, a communist activist), Paris, and arcades of these respective cities.

<sup>824</sup> For a book-length study of this notion, see J. McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the antinomies of tradition*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially Chapter 6, 'Benjamin and Proust: Remembering' is concerned with Benjamin's writings on Proust as well as the notion of involuntary memory, the 'bridge' between memory and dream, and the 'doctrine of memory in Benjamin's later work, see p. 253-279

<sup>825</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 39

Buck-Morss interprets Benjamin's work on Baudelaire as a case in point of such an interpretative act of discovery. Especially Baudelaire's attempt to positioning his work in an ever-expanding literary market is crucial:

Baudelaire turned this inner psychological characteristic into a market advantage. In his attempt to compete in the literary marketplace [...] he had to distinguish his own work from that of other poets.<sup>826</sup> Baudelaire's obsession, his 'specialty' (indeed, his trademark), was the 'sensation of the new.'<sup>827</sup> Benjamin speaks of the 'inestimable value for Baudelaire of the nouveauté. The new cannot be interpreted, or compared. It becomes the ultimate retrenchment of art.'<sup>828</sup> Making novelty 'the highest value' was the strategy of *l'art pour l'art*, the aesthetic position Baudelaire adopted in 1852. As non-conformism, it was in 'rebellion against the surrender of art to the market.'<sup>829</sup> Ironically, however, this 'last line of resistance of art' converged with the commodity form that threatened it: Novelty is 'the quintessence of false consciousness, the tireless agent of which is fashion.'<sup>830</sup> It is the 'appearance of the new [that] is reflected like one mirror in another in the appearance of the always-the-same.'<sup>831</sup> The same dialectic of temporality lies concealed in Baudelaire's own sensibility. Baudelaire 'did not know nostalgia.'<sup>832</sup> At the same time, he renounced progress:

It is very significant that 'the new' in Baudelaire in no way makes a contribution to progress. [...] It is above all the 'belief in progress' that he persecutes with hate, as a heresy, a false doctrine, not merely a simple error.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>826</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 194

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*



Progress here relates to the idea of *universal* progress, as I have argued elsewhere. The object of Baudelaire's destructive attack, according to Buck-Morss, is against the phantasmagoria of his age; it

included the "harmonious façade" of continuous historical progress. In its place, expressed in his poems is (in Proust's words) "a strange sectioning of time," shock-like segments of 'empty time,' each of which is like a "warning signal." His spleen places a century between the present moment and the one that has just been lived.<sup>834</sup>

Buck-Morss continues her investigation of the dialectical image by explaining that Benjamin 'was at least convinced of one thing: what was needed was a visual, not a linear logic: The concepts were to be imagistically constructed, according to the cognitive principles of montage.'<sup>835</sup> Benjamin's interest in the nineteenth century and its objects meant that he saw them in their relation to and lasting impact on the *present*. They were 'to be made visible as the *origin* of the present, at the same time that every assumption of progress was to be scrupulously rejected.'<sup>836</sup> Counter-intuitively, 'in order for a piece of the past to be touched by present actuality, there must exist no continuity between them.'<sup>837</sup> She explains that when Benjamin noted that construction presupposes destruction, what he meant is for historical objects to be constituted by being 'blasted' out of the historical continuum.<sup>838</sup> Their structure is monadological, into which

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<sup>834</sup> Ibid.

<sup>835</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 218

<sup>836</sup> Ibid.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid. Note the notion of *explosion* here – which is a recurrent idea in both Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image and the the *These on the Philosophy of History*, as well as Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. See 'Preface: On Apparition,' in Bernard Hoeckner, *Apparitions: Essays on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Music*, (New York; Abingdon, Routledge, 2006), p. ix

‘all the forces and interests of history enter on a reduced scale.’<sup>839</sup> Finally, to uncover this structure is for truth to appear:

‘Truth [...] is bound to a temporal nucleus which is lodged in both the known and the knower.’ In a tension-filled constellation with the present, this ‘temporal nucleus’ becomes politically charged, polarized dialectically,’ as ‘a force field, in which the conflict between its fore- and after-history plays itself out.’<sup>840</sup>

These objects ‘are prototypes, ur-phenomena that can be recognized as precursors of the present, no matter how distant or estranged they now appear.’<sup>841</sup> This fore-history of the object reveals in certain cases a possibility, including what Benjamin terms its utopian potential, whilst its after-history ‘is that which, as an object of natural history, it has in fact become.’<sup>842</sup> Buck-Morss underlines that both are ‘legible within the “monadological structure” of the historical object that has been ‘blasted free’ of history’s continuum.’<sup>843</sup> In the traces left by the object’s after-history, ‘the conditions of its decay and the manner of its cultural transmission, the utopian images of past objects can be read in the present as truth.’<sup>844</sup> Interestingly, it is the ‘forceful confrontation of the fore- and after-life of the object that makes it ‘actual’ in the political sense – as presence of mind’ (*Geistesgegenwart*) – and it is not progress but ‘actualization’ in which ur-history culminates.’<sup>845</sup> As Benjamin wrote in the *Arcades Project*, ‘the dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognisability [*im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*].’<sup>846</sup> Benjamin was counting on the shock of

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<sup>839</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 218

<sup>840</sup> Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

<sup>846</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 473

this recognition to jolt the dreaming collective into a political awakening. The presentation of the historical object within a charged force field of past and present, which produces political electricity in a lightning flash of truth, is the dialectical image. Unlike Hegel's logic, it is dialectics at a standstill.<sup>847</sup>

However, when it comes to the work of art, the idea of *progress* is once again redeemable:

In every true work of art there is a place where, for one who resides there, it blows cool like the wind of a coming dawn. From this it follows that art, which has often been considered refractory to every relation with progress, can provide its true definition. Progress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but in its interferences – where the truly new makes itself felt for the first time, with the sobriety of dawn.<sup>848</sup>

For Buck-Morss, the moment when thought 'comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions, there appears the dialectical image. It is the caesura in the movement of thought.'<sup>849</sup> The image's *positioning*, she argues, is in no way arbitrary. According to her

it is to be sought at the point where the tension between the dialectical opposition is the greatest. The dialectical image [...] is identical to the historical object; it justifies blasting the latter out of the continuum of history's course.<sup>850</sup>

I now turn briefly to a literary example of such a dialectical image, which takes it beyond the nineteenth century, and to Benjamin's critique of Surrealism,<sup>851</sup> which he later included in the

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<sup>847</sup> Ibid.

<sup>848</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 474 [Convolute N9a, 8]

<sup>849</sup> Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 218

<sup>850</sup> Ibid. However, I would argue that the object and its interpretation coming together in a dialectical image – which is what Benjamin argues – is not quite the identity between dialectical image and historical object Buck-Morss refers to. The latter, if understood as an *object-in-historical-time*, is not the same as the moment its appears in the now of its recognizability.

famous essay on ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility.’<sup>852</sup> It concerns the interpretation of one of the most well-known Surrealist texts, André Breton’s novel *Nadja*.<sup>853</sup>

Although quite critical of the French Surrealists, including Breton, who

declared his intention of breaking with a praxis that presents the public with the literary precipitate of a certain form of existence while withholding that existence itself. Stated more briefly and dialectically, this means that the sphere of poetry was here exploded from within by a closely knit circle of people pushing the “poetic life” to the utmost limits of possibility.<sup>854</sup>

For Buck-Morss, this work’s ‘meditative objects’ constitute ‘objects of the “new” nature: a woman’s glove, a cigarette lying in an ashtray, the luminous sign advertising Mazda lightbulbs on the boulevard. Yet that which distinguished the theological symbol, the ‘unity of sensory and supersensory object,’ is precisely what Benjamin found in these Surrealist texts.<sup>855</sup> As Buck-Morss shows, in the same way he had considered the *Trauerspiel* allegorists, Benjamin thought of the Surrealists’ ‘revelatory vision of historically transient objects’ as establishing a ‘philosophical position rather than an aesthetic technique.’<sup>856</sup> In other words, for Benjamin it

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<sup>851</sup> See Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,’ in *Selected Writings*, Marcus Jennings (ed.), 4 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1996), pp. 207-221

<sup>852</sup> See especially footnotes 27 and 31 in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,’ p. 301 and 131.

<sup>853</sup> *Nadja*, published in 1928, opens with the question ‘Who am I?’ and is an autobiographical novel based on Breton’s relationship with a woman, Léona Delcourt, who used to be a patient of the psychoanalyst Pierre Janet. The book has a non-linear structure and refers to other Parisian surrealists. It does not consist of an introspective or psychological analysis, but relates seemingly unimportant anecdotes and impressions, arguing against the illusory aspect of other, contemporaneous novelists’ styles. André Breton, *Nadja*, (Paris, NRF, 1928); André Breton, *Nadja*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 1, (Bibliothèque de La Pléiade), (Paris, Gallimard, 1988), pp. 643-753. See Jean-Paul Clébert, *Dictionnaire du Surréalisme*, (Chamalières, Éditions du Seuil & A.T.P., 1996), pp. 403ff.

<sup>854</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism,’ *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208

<sup>855</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 238

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238

was more about the profane illumination – of a ‘material, anthropological inspiration.’<sup>857</sup> As Benjamin wrote that for the Surrealists

Life seemed worth living only where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth; language seemed itself only where sound and image, image and sound, interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called “meaning”<sup>858</sup>

She argues that the *cognitive* experience ‘which the Surrealist images provided, while related to that of the mystics, was “dialectical” rather than “mysterious,” and in fact more difficult to attain.’<sup>859</sup> Benjamin called it the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination, for which religious experience (as well as hashish or falling in love) was merely the ‘introductory lesson.’<sup>860</sup>

The dialectics of intoxication are indeed curious. Is not perhaps all ecstasy in *one* world humiliating sobriety in the world complementary to it? What is it that courtly *Minne* seeks (and it, not love, binds Breton to the telepathic girl), if not to make chastity, too, a transport? Into a world that borders not only on tombs of the Sacred Heart or altars to the Virgin, but also on the morning before a battle or after a victory.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>857</sup> Ibid.

<sup>858</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism,’ p. 208

<sup>859</sup> Ibid.

<sup>860</sup> Benjamin, ‘Surrealism,’ p. 209

<sup>861</sup> Ibid., p. 210

### The dialectical image in Benjamin and Adorno

‘The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost.’<sup>862</sup>

This theory’s genealogy is rather complex, as it was substantially developed in conversations between Adorno and Benjamin, with Horkheimer occasionally joining them in the discussions.<sup>863</sup> As Rolf Tiedemann observes, Benjamin himself never found his way to a more exhaustive explication of the category of the dialectical image; the term never once appears in the texts published during his lifetime.<sup>864</sup> It did reach the public when Adorno published his *Habilitation* thesis in 1933. Adorno writes that in such images ‘the dialectic comes to a standstill,’ citing that ‘the mythical in the historically most recent as the distant past: nature as proto-history.’<sup>865</sup> According to Tiedemann, these conversations ‘traced the entwining of myth and the new, of the ever-same (*das Immergleichen*) and history, back to the commodity fetishism analyzed by Marx.’<sup>866</sup> This strong similarity between the workings of the commodity and the artwork are as significant as they are illusive; in *The Arcades Project* Benjamin recorded a reference to Otto Rühle’s biography of Karl Marx, who argued that the *commodity* receives a price tag and enters the market

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<sup>862</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N9,7]

<sup>863</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 5, p. 1117; Walter Benjamin, Gershom Gerhard Scholem, and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, (Chicago; London, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 489. See also Rolf Tiedemann, ‘Concept, Image, Name’, in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity. Essays in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, (MIT, Cambridge (Mass.), 1997), p. 133

<sup>864</sup> Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 133

<sup>865</sup> Ibid., p.133. Tiedemann cites Adorno, GS 2, p. 80, who refers to his *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, translated and edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 54

<sup>866</sup> Ibid., p. 133

place.<sup>867</sup> He argues that if its ‘substantive quality and individuality create the incentive to buy,’ this has no relevance for the ‘social evaluation of its worth.’<sup>868</sup> In other words, the ‘commodity has become an abstraction’ and ‘once it has escaped from the hand of its producers and is freed from its real particularity,’<sup>869</sup> At this point the product is no longer controlled by human beings. In this sense, it has taken on a ‘ghost-like objectivity,’<sup>870</sup> and leads its own life. However, whilst a ‘commodity appears at first glance a self-sufficient, trivial thing,’ its analysis shows that it is a ‘bewildering thing, full of metaphysical subtleties and theological capers.’<sup>871</sup> Benjamin notes that Marx spoke of the commodity’s fetish character, which has ‘its origins in the peculiar character of the labour that produces commodities [...] It is only the particular social relation between people that here assumes, in the eyes of these people, the phantasmagorical form of a relation between things.’<sup>872</sup> It seems to share this with the (modernist) artwork.

In a 1935 letter to Max Horkheimer about the first draft of the *Passagenwerk*, Adorno first wrote about Benjamin’s project – as ‘an attempt to disclose the nineteenth century as ‘style’ through

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<sup>867</sup> This refers to Benjamin’s quotation of Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx. Leben und Werk*, (Hellerau bei Dresden, Avalun-Verlag, 1928), pp. 384-385; translated as Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx: His Life and Works*, (New York, The Viking Press, 1929) in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, *op. cit.*, p. 181-182, [Convolute G 5, 1]: ‘With price tag affixed, the commodity comes on the market. Its material quality and individuality are merely an incentive for buying and selling; for the social measure of its value, such quality is of no importance whatsoever. The commodity has become an abstraction. Once escaped from the hand of the producer and divested of its real particularity, it ceases to be a product and to be ruled over by human beings. It has acquired a ghostly objectivity’ and leads a life of its own.’

<sup>868</sup> Ibid.

<sup>869</sup> Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

<sup>871</sup> Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx. Leben und Werk*, (Hellerau bei Dresden, Avalun-Verlag, 1928); translated as Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx: His Life and Works*, (New York, The Viking Press, 1929) cited in Benjamin GS V, p. 245; See also *The Arcades Project*, p. 181-182

<sup>872</sup> Ibid.

the category of the commodity as a dialectical image.<sup>873</sup> Susan Buck-Morss suggests that Benjamin was thinking in *coordinates*: his ‘unfolding of concepts in their ‘extremes’ can be visualized as antithetical polarities of axes that cross each other, revealing a ‘dialectical image’ at the null point (the commodity), with its contradictory ‘moments’ as axial fields. [...] Each field of the coordinates can then be said to describe one aspect of the physiognomic appearance of the commodity, showing its contradictory ‘faces’; fetish and fossil; wish image and ruin.<sup>874</sup>

Moreover, some authors, such as Pierre Missac, note that the image in itself predates Benjamin’s encounters with dialectics as such (and thus confront image with dialectic).<sup>875</sup> He argues that the encounter between the two notions that make up the dialectical image ‘is all the more striking – Adorno would say paradoxical – in that they are both fundamental for Benjamin.’<sup>876</sup> Missac avers that ‘one cannot repeat too often that the image is one of the first and original sources of Benjamin’s mode of thought, and the dialectic, which comes later on, underlies many aspects of his mode of proceeding.’<sup>877</sup> In Convolute N of *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin himself explains what he understands to be a dialectical image when he argues for an understanding of the *temporal* relation between the present and the past and the dialectics of *what-has-been* and the *now*. That the latter relation is a dialectical one implies that neither of these terms can be understood in or by itself *alone*:

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<sup>873</sup> There is an important contrast between Adornoian and Benjaminian notions of the dialectical image, when confronting Pierre Missac (and Haverkamp) with Rolf Tiedemann (concept, image, name). The first two argue about how dialectical the dialectical image is (and how applicable it is), whilst the latter is interested in its epistemological aspects.

<sup>874</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, *op. cit.*, p. 210

<sup>875</sup> Missac, Pierre, *Passages de Walter Benjamin*, (Paris, Sevil, 1987); translated as Pierre Missac, *Walter Benjamin's Passages*, (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), (Cambridge, Mass.; London, MIT Press, 1995)

<sup>876</sup> Missac, *op. cit.*

<sup>877</sup> Pierre Missac, *Walter Benjamin's Passages*, transl. by S. Weber Nicholse, MIT, Cambridge (Mass.), p. 111



‘It is not that what is past [which] casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, [the] image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature, but figural [bildlich]. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical – that is, not archaic – images. The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability – bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.’<sup>878</sup>

What Benjamin explains is that the construction of the relation between what has been and the now is important to keep in mind; not only is this constellation not to be *reified*, it is there only momentarily. Whilst the reader grasps its meaning, it disappears immediately. Archaic images, in contrast, cannot be historical in the sense of a discontinuity between what has been and the now – the moment in which something from the past is understood. Importantly, this understanding has as a consequence that what it brings together is no longer separated in time and thus temporal. What is static in this form of reading is only so very briefly. The relation of past and present on the other hand should then be understood as temporal, as well as dialectical. This could be translated (in terms of the work of art) by pointing to the attempt of some works to arrest the flow of time, or the illusion of this temporality, as a *construction* or *composition*,<sup>879</sup> in the

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<sup>878</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades*, [N3,1]

<sup>879</sup> Tiedemann, ‘Concept, Image, Name,’ p. 137 Tiedemann refers to an essay by Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Mit den Ohren Denken. Zu einigen musikphilosophischen Motiven bei Adorno,’ in Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Adorno Noten*, (Berlin, 1984), pp. 21-22. Metzger ‘defends the staggering thesis that the concepts of knowledge and composition are basically synonymous in Adorno.’ He refers to Adorno’s reliance on Max Weber, when Adorno former wrote what is essential is ‘that to which Weber gives the name of “composing,” a name which orthodox scientists would find unacceptable. He is indeed looking only at the subjective side, at cognitive procedure; but the “compositions” in question are apt to follow similar rules as their nalogue, *the musical compositions* [my stress]. These are subjectively produced, but they work only where the subjective production is submerged in them. The subjectively created context – the “constellation” – becomes readable as a sign of an objectivity: of the spiritual substance. What resembles writing in such constellations is the conversion into objectivity, by way

same sense as a constellation of what has been and is now. 'This could be read as an image'<sup>880</sup> which – in the sense of the figural mentioned above – comes to bear upon this relation. In other words, the artwork carries in itself the precarious moment of understanding Benjamin refers to, if it is to be read dialectically.

Thus, the important difference with earlier conceptualizations of the image is the dialectical image's *readability*. Furthermore, the dialectical image is to be found in the moment of interpretation (or, as Benjamin calls it 'the now of its recognizability'), where what has been and the now briefly meet. Importantly, this meeting point is not simply a subjective experience in the temporally, fleeting sense (it passes), but one which is understood as an image (like a snapshot). Benjamin here brings what belonged to the domain of space and – what Missac calls the 'phantasmagoria of space, where it masters the effects of closeness and distance'<sup>881</sup> – into the realm of time.

'The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost.'<sup>882</sup>

Another aspect of the dialectical image lies in its moment of *awakening*. In this moment of awakening or *profane illumination* (to use Benjamin's own terminology), the present 'absorbs time

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of language, of what has been subjectively thought and assembled.' [Theodor W. Adorno, GS 6, pp. 167-68, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 165] Tiedemann unpacks the structure and syntax of the last three phrases, where composition refers to both musical composition and Weberian sociology; the latter only being treated 'in the final sentence.' *Ibid.*, p. 137

<sup>880</sup> See also Rolf Tiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 137

<sup>881</sup> Pierre Missac, *op. cit.*, p. 110

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*

and turns it into an eternal present, author of the most astonishing interpretations.’<sup>883</sup> For Missac, this refers to Paul Valéry, who said: ‘The present transforms itself into the future by means of the past.’<sup>884</sup>

For Benjamin, the dialectical image awakes from the *collective of dreams*, which is an explicit reference to Freud. Freud’s importance for Benjamin’s own interpretative approach, with regard understanding the exploits of Surrealism has been a topic of research with a history of its own.<sup>885</sup> The scholar Margaret Cohen argues in this regard that Benjamin’s dialectical image resembles the construction of analysis in ‘the curious objectivity that Benjamin attributes to it.’<sup>886</sup> Cohen argues that Benjamin’s use of ‘psychoanalytic language, notably dream language, has been considered the place where he substitutes the smoke and mirrors of writerly technique for critical analysis.’<sup>887</sup> In contrast to a number of writers, she sees Benjamin’s conclusion to ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’<sup>888</sup> as seemingly positing the dialectical image as an accurate reconstruction of the material forces producing the nineteenth-century world of dreams. She argues that when Benjamin wrote that

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<sup>883</sup> Pierre Missac, *op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>884</sup> Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Vol. 1, p. 1328. Cited by Pierre Missac, *op. cit.*, p.111

<sup>885</sup> See Ernst Bloch, ‘Revue Form in Philosophy,’ in *Heritage of Our Times*; Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Benjamins “Einbahnstraße,”’ in *Über Walter Benjamin*, *op. cit.*; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.* and *The Dialectics of Seeing*, *op. cit.*, Elizabeth Lenk and Rita Bischof, ‘L’Intrication surréelle du rêve et de l’histoire dans les Passages de Benjamin,’ in *Walter Benjamin et Paris*, Heinz Wismann (ed.), (Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1986), pp. 179-199

<sup>886</sup> Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Weimar and Now 5) (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), p. 47. She argues that analytic constructions have an objectivity far from that of ‘objective constellations in which the social situation represents itself.’

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>888</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,’ in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 *op. cit.*,

Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie. But only Surrealism exposed them to view. The development of the forces of production reduced the wish symbols of the previous century to rubble even before the monuments representing them had crumbled.<sup>889</sup>

Benjamin further suggests his ‘interest as that of an archeologist confronting the ruins of a time gone by.’<sup>890</sup> She points to the difference between critical construction and reconstruction, as Benjamin ‘places his dialectical image in an oddly utopian realm.’<sup>891</sup> She cites Benjamin, who asserts that ‘ambiguity is the imagistic appearance of dialectics, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia.’<sup>892</sup> Cohen explains that for Benjamin, ‘terming the place where dialectics appear as a non-place, utopia,’ he ‘both associates it with an alternative to the place where these dialectical processes work and a place saturated with wishful affect: utopia is not only a non-place but a non-place where wishes are fulfilled.’<sup>893</sup> She compares this with psychoanalytic analysis which ‘too places its construction in an oddly utopian realm, whose peculiar non-place can once more be designated in passing with a suggestive passage from Freud.’<sup>894</sup> Cohen refers here to Freud’s writings on manifestations of transference, which according to Freud ‘do us inestimable service of making the patient’s hidden and forgotten erotic impulses immediate and manifest. For when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or in *effigie*.’<sup>895</sup> The (non) site of this impossible activity – which Cohen explains can be read as the literal reality of the imaginary transference, which simultaneously denies ‘the very power to act in absentia that he in fact has just shown it to have’<sup>896</sup> – can be found in language. As we have seen

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<sup>889</sup> Ibid.

<sup>890</sup> Ibid., p. 161. Cited by Margaret Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 47

<sup>891</sup> Ibid.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid., p. 48. She does not give a specific reference to Benjamin’s work.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid.

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid.

Benjamin argue, the dialectical image is not an archaic image, but a ‘genuine’ one, ‘and the place one meets them is language.’<sup>897</sup> For Cohen, the boundary between linguistic and visual media disappears ultimately, both in psychoanalytic terms and in Benjamin’s dialectical image:

the two media signify an unconscious content in a fashion that is neither linguistically nor visually specific and in designating this form of representation an image (*Bild*), Benjamin chooses a term central to Freud’s discussion of that *other* form of representation as well, notably in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>898</sup>

Dream image, wish image and dialectical image, then, are not the same, because the dream would be less a mirror image [*Abbild*] than consciousness, as it reacts with images of desire and fear. These are not to be confused with subjective instants of consciousness [*Bewusstseinsinhalte*], but are objective constellations through which their societal position realizes itself. In other words, Benjamin proposes the concept of the dialectical image as an objective category of thought, in which experience (often seen as purely personal and subjective) and knowledge (accessible to a collective) meet. To be sure, this is not a religious experience – in the sense of a revelation [*Offenbarung*] – but a moment of *profane* (materialist) *illumination*.

What constitutes this moment of profane illumination? In order to answer this question, I turn to the work of Anselm Haverkamp, who is interested in how ‘deconstructive’ the dialectical image is as a reading strategy.<sup>899</sup> As Haverkamp writes, the more mystical connotations of the *now* are often overestimated, whilst the ‘implications of the word *readability* have been systematically played down.’<sup>900</sup> For him this readability, ‘gives to reading a flair of ‘profane illumination,’ is

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<sup>897</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arades*, *op. cit.*, Convolute N 2a, p. 3

<sup>898</sup> Margaret Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 48

<sup>899</sup> Anselm Haverkamp, ‘Notes on the “dialectical Image” (How Deconstructive is it?)’, in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22, No. 3/4 commemorating Walter Benjamin (Autumn-Winter, 1992), p. 69-80

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*

certainly no ecstatic access to some recognition scene, or immediate vision,' although he sees Benjamin's references to platonic and mystical language and traditions as attempts to ironize these motifs 'in order to reuse from 'ideas,' as outlined in the 'Epistemological Prologue,' that which lends itself to new 'configurations' and falls into place within a new 'constellation.'<sup>901</sup>. Convoluted N resumes part of this design (of *Darstellung*), including the insistence on the specific temporality of reading created in and through allegory. There is, no doubt, reading involved, and this reading's temporal structure is no longer (as it, in fact, never was) that of a mere flow of time towards figural fulfillment (in terms of *figura* and *implementum*).<sup>902</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, p. 214-181; cited in Anselm Haverkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 74

<sup>902</sup> Anselm Haverkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 74

## On Reading and Readability

The temporal structure of the image converts seeing into reading, image into text. If what is essential about the image is that it is ‘not seen before being remembered.’<sup>903</sup>

An important point Benjamin stresses, is that images are eminently historical, in that they offer us a glimpse of past moments in time but only become intelligible or ‘recognizable’ at a certain time. He confronts this *historical* position of the reader with a historicist approach of Heidegger,<sup>904</sup> which proposes universal (ahistorical) categories, concepts and essences:

What distinguishes images from the ‘essences’ of phenomenology is their historical index. Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through ‘historicity’. These images are to be thought of entirely apart from the categories of the ‘human sciences,’ from so-called habitus, from style and the like. For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding ‘to legibility’ constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each ‘now’ is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time.<sup>905</sup>

Benjamin contrasts the dialectical image with what he sees as rigidified and reified myth. The paradigm of the dialectical image is the allegory, which is posited against myth and archetype. Adorno, added to the rejection of the archetypal criticism, as Haverkamp argues, by adding ‘reflections not only on the historicity of the ‘imagistic’ [*das Bildliche*] in general, but also on the relationship between dialectic, myth, and image: for nature does not prevail forever alive and

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<sup>903</sup> Rebecca Comay, ‘Materialist Mutations of the *Bilderverbot*,’ in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London, New York, Continuum, 2005), p. 56; she cites Walter Benjamin, GS 1.3, p. 1064

<sup>904</sup> For a comparative critique of Benjamin’s and Heidegger’s (as well as John Dewey’s and Jean-Paul Sartre’s), see Beatrice Hanssen, ‘Benjamin or Heidegger: Aesthetics and Politics in an Age of Technology,’ in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London, New York, Continuum, 2005), pp. 73-92 and Arne Melberg, ‘The Work of Art in The Age of Ontological Speculation: Walter Benjamin Revisited,’ pp. 93-107

<sup>905</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, *op. cit.*, Convolute N, 3.1, p. 462-463

present in the dialectic. Dialectic comes to a halt in the image and in the historically latest it cites myth as the long past and gone: nature as primeval history [*Urgeschichte*].<sup>906</sup> In this passage from his Kierkegaard book, Adorno refers to the idea of *citing*, of the citation as a cliché; according to Haverkamp, ‘that dialectics “cites” is its “halt” in the image. What it reveals is sort of ‘antediluvian fossil.’ As a fossil, ‘the image in question is anything but a *métaphore vive*; it is rather, in the reemerging theory of tropes, catachresis.<sup>907</sup> For Haverkamp, Adorno reads the dialectical moment, when history ‘reveals its mythical nature in allegory, as the moment when dialectics surfaces and becomes manifest as ‘image’ or ‘figure.’<sup>908</sup> Crucially, as Haverkamp points out, Benjamin’s dialectical image in Adorno’s hands, demands a generalization. He argues that

the dialectical image is this generalization, although Benjamin’s application has to struggle in the effort of adapting the model of allegory to and translating its lexicon for that purpose into the version called ‘commodity’, or it could be argued, as the work of art.<sup>909</sup>

In contrast to some authors (like Susan Buck-Morss),<sup>910</sup> I understand the dialectic image as a dynamic concept, not a static one.<sup>911</sup> It is not the image of a moment that is pure and free,

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<sup>906</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen*, in GS 2, p. 100; in translation by Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Kierkegaard. Construction of the Aesthetic*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 54. Cited in Haverkamp, ‘Notes on the “Dialectical Image” (How Deconstructive is it?),’ in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22, No. ¾ Commemorating Walter Benjamin (Autumn-Winter, 1992), p. 73; see also Peter Fenves, ‘Image and Chatter: Adorno’s Construction of Kierkegaard,’ in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22 (Spring 1992), pp. 100-114

<sup>907</sup> Haverkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 73. Catachresis, from the Greek *κατάχρησις*, ‘abuse,’ means semantic misuse or error. It also refers to the crossing of categorical boundaries with words. It was often used in Baroque literature, for example in the *Trauerspiele* to express extreme emotions or affects, as well as figuring in Surrealist and Dadaist literature. Benjamin is interested in this rhetorical device for these different reasons.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid.

<sup>909</sup> In his Convolute N titled ‘Epistemology’ in the *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin does not explore this paradigm switch, however, but the historicity of a certain ‘Now’ of readability. See Haverkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 73-74

<sup>910</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, p. 210

<sup>911</sup> I would like to refer to the opening quotation of this section by Rebecca Comay, who shows this movement in her interpretation of the *reading* the dialectical image provides as a *temporal* aspect of its structure.



without past or future, but burdened ‘beyond its capacities and taking on the designs of history’.<sup>912</sup> This is, as argued above, in contrast with approaches to understandings of the image in archaic terms, or as archetypal musical images. As we will shortly see, compositions such as Feldman’s *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, stress the vertical dimension of music, and not the developmental, horizontal dimension. It is crucial to understand how closely the instrumental images presented resemble these flashes mentioned above, and how they are both spatial in nature, but also temporal. This temporality is not to be conceived in a traditional way, as in a continuous conception of time; they appear as broken fragments. However, the connections between these seemingly unrelated motifs, or sound objects, contradict a conception which would do away with any form of coherence. In other words, the three composers I will discuss apply varying technical means to establish this renewed sense of form. To conclude this I like refer to Benjamin’s definition of the dialectical image as one which wishes to be read, in the now of its recognizability, bearing

to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded. [It] emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost.<sup>913</sup>

It is this idea of moments strung together in a way that allows for aesthetic insight in their origin and construction, as well as for the experience of them in a temporally transient way, accepting the possibility that their spatial (acoustic and graphic) element is not fully reified in the sense Adorno found in the music of Wagner or Stravinsky, for example. In other words, does the musical work of art in its post-war avant-garde manifestation establish a non-identical relation between its spatial aspect and the extramusical world? I argue that this is not the case, and that

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<sup>912</sup> Pierre Missac, *op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>913</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades*, *op. cit.*, [N9,7]

Adorno's fears are mediated in ways by which the image-like aspects have sufficiently critical facets, which do not allow for any constellation to petrify or be reified. This conception of objects as *objects-in-motion* could then supply the necessary critical space for a discussion of musical temporality and the spatialization as evident in the work of a number of composers, unlike the hardened objects and concepts criticized by Adorno as clichés.<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>914</sup> See Anselm Haverkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 73, especially on Adorno's Kierkegaard book (as referenced above)

### The sound-object re-conceptualized: immanent critique and analysis in light of the dialectical image

In order to develop a theory which can grasp the reality of the new music – as composed by the three composers studied in this thesis – a concrete understanding of how time and space interact in their work must be grounded in a study of their compositional technique. As this is the object of inquiry in the later chapters of this thesis, it suffices here to include that which their particular approaches have in common, specifically regarding the relation between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of music. This includes the insight that for a composer like Edgard Varèse, who can be regarded as the inventor of a different type of new music (in which the ‘new’ itself is central),<sup>915</sup> these two aspects of music are seen as intertwined. According to the German musicologist Helga de la Motte-Haber, who wrote a seminal work on his music, Varèse shares this approach with other composers of his generation, including Olivier Messiaen and Henri Cowell.<sup>916</sup> She writes that however different ‘the methods of the composers may have been, they are still concerned with a thinking which assumes an identity of the vertical with the horizontal dimension of music.’<sup>917</sup> For example, this ‘applies to Henri Cowell’s 1930 proposal (expressed in *New Musical Resources*),<sup>918</sup> to represent the proportions of a chord structure as a temporal sequence.

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<sup>915</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, *Die Musik Von Edgard Varèse: Studien Zu Seinen Nach 1918 Entstandenen Werken*, (Hofheim, Wolke Verlag, 1993)

<sup>916</sup> Ibid., p. 140

<sup>917</sup> Ibid. ‘Wie unterschiedlich die Verfahren der Komponisten auch waren, so gehen sie doch immer mit einem Denken einher, das von einer Identität der vertikalen mit der horizontalen Dimension der Musik ausgeht.’

<sup>918</sup> Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, annotated, with an accompanying essay, by David Nicholls, (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1930])

This was an important stimulus for later attempts to organize the pitches [in the way of Karlheinz Stockhausen's] "how time passes."<sup>919</sup>

De la Motte suggests a reference to Stockhausen's famous essay on the topic of musical time; however, the crucial element in her argument is concerned with the changed attitude to how music unfolds, especially in light of the loss of tonal harmony. As she explains with regard to the second movement of *Octandre*, Varèse works with different techniques, which effectuate this identity between line and sound:

However, since compression is one of his most important principles for the verticalization of melodies, they should first be illuminated in a music-historical context. With the dissolution of tonality composers no longer had the opportunity to traverse space by overcoming harmonic distances. Since there were no longer tonally determined distances, differences between the harmonies were levelled and thus the logic of progression was no longer mandatory. The verticalization of lines is a technique various composers used, a technique with a double intention, namely to possibly achieve a tight connection and yet to maintain similarities and differences between the harmonies, including nearness and distance.<sup>920</sup>

To fully understand the idea of verticalization, an aspect of the spatialization of musical temporality, I will now turn to a final crucial element for the development of a theory of the

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<sup>919</sup> Helga de la Motte, *op. cit.*, p. 140. 'Dies gilt auch für den 1930 von Henri Cowell (in den *New Musical Resources*) geäußerten Vorschlag, die Proportionen eines Akkordaufbaus als zeitliche abfolge darzustellen. Dies war eine wichtige Anregung für spätere versuche, die Tonhöhen so zu organisieren "wie die Zeit vergeht".'

<sup>920</sup> Ibid., p. 139. 'Da die Stauchung jedoch zu einem seiner wichtigsten Prinzipien der Vertikalisierung von Melodien gehört, sei sie zunächst einmal in einem musikgeschichtlichen Kontext beleuchtet. Mit der Auflösung der Tonalität verfügten Komponisten nicht mehr über die Möglichkeit, Räume zu durchmessen, indem sie harmonische Entfernungen überwandten. Indem es keine tonartlich bestimmten Distanzen mehr gab, waren Unterschiede zwischen den Harmonien eingeebnet und damit die Logik des Fortschreitens nicht mehr zwingend. Die Vertikalisierung von Linien ist ein Mittel, dessen sich verschiedene Komponisten bedienten, wobei zweierlei damit intendiert war, nämlich einen möglichst dichten Zusammenhang zu erreichen und dennoch Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede, damit auch Nähe und Entfernung, zwischen den Zusammenklängen zu erhalten.'

(in)formel, drawing on Benjamin's theory of the *object*, and the *dialectical image*. This will lead to a reconceptualization of the sound object, in order to approach the music of Varèse, Feldman and Xenakis in a new light.

Just as these composers chose sound itself to generate compositional strategies – respecting sound-in-itself as an object which should not simply be organized according to traditional forms – Adorno's aesthetics builds on Walter Benjamin's writings, whose theory of a *natural language* of the objects is highly influential to his own conceptualization of the artwork and, accordingly, is also to be considered here. Through an understanding of the affinities and references to this theory – which considers the world as dominated by our systematic, reductive *naming* of objects – Adorno's own aesthetics appears in a new light: a non-normative, open theory which resists any form of definition, including Adorno's own preoccupation with a seemingly limited, exclusive canon of musical works. In this theory, the object – traditionally considered a static entity – appears as *becoming*, in other words, in movement.<sup>921</sup> The theory of language proposed by Benjamin is based on the idea that 'naming is what human beings do as human beings, yet language alone speaks in the name. In other words, the spiritual aspects of human beings is 'language pure and simple.'<sup>922</sup> Benjamin's 'enigmatic, theological theory of language clearly provoked Adorno's theory of cognition as a naming. [...]all things communicate themselves in the name alone [...]; it can be described as the 'language of language.' Furthermore, 'all nature communicates itself in language, and all languages communicate themselves ultimately in the name,' in a so-called 'pure language'. According to Krakauer, 'for Benjamin as well [as for

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<sup>921</sup> Claudia Brodsky, "Framing the Sensuous: Objecthood and "Objectivity" in Art after Adorno, Bernstein, J.M., *Art and aesthetics after Adorno*. 2010, Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California., pp. 69-115; see *supra*

<sup>922</sup> Walter Benjamin, GS, II, 1, p. 144, as quoted by E.L., Krakauer, *The disposition of the subject : reading Adorno's dialectic of technology*. (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 168

Adorno], word and *Sache* [object] unite in the name [...].’ Crucially, the name is ‘the translation of the language of things into that of human beings.’ This implies the thought that the ‘apparently dialectical relation of the human subject to the objective world is essentially a linguistic relation, one between incommensurable languages. And the work of human beings at changing and perfecting the world is ‘essentially’ the work of translation.’ Finally, it is the ‘work of cognition, understood as the reading or interpreting of one language which transforms that text into another.’

The recent literature on Benjamin’s and Adorno’s aesthetics on the one hand, and the musicological studies of the music of the composers discussed here on the other hand, not only show strong affinities: they help to clarify important issues in the interpretation of Adorno’s aesthetics. In the sense that these musical works reveal something objectively true about the time and society in which they were created, artworks come together with their interpretation and critique in what Benjamin and Adorno called dialectical images – images that can be *read*. It is by means of this key idea of the image, formed when dialectics comes to a standstill, that the music of these composers momentarily illuminates the aesthetic writings of these philosophers.

Objects (and especially art objects), for Adorno, can be negatively defined as *not-yet-reified monads*: otherwise they would revert to being what he terms *culture objects*. Philosophically, the search for that which is not fully reified points to a *becoming* at the core of the art object, rather than a static *being*: this, for Adorno, is a crucial criterion for the artwork to be validly modernist. As I have already argued, *musique informelle* presents the most developed and utopian concept of the modernist artwork; and later, more generally in *Aesthetic Theory* he further investigates this notion. It is at this point that a controversial reading of Adorno’s thinking on the form/content dialectic of new music, the notion of *progress* regarding the musical material, and the unshakeable identity

of the dynamic of *becoming* in philosophical terms with a particular pitch-based compositional technique could be seen as the central problem of his aesthetics of music; namely, the identity between this *becoming* and the regression to motivic-thematic thinking as an ideal of *motion* at the core of the artwork (as I have already shown in Borio's critique). This seems to be inconsistent not only with Benjamin's theory, but with Adorno's own philosophy; this systematic blind spot lies in precisely the standstill he critiqued in Benjamin's work as not dialectical enough,<sup>923</sup> whilst making an historical jump back to artworks of the atonal period, where to some extent thematic-motivic thinking was given its last critical spin. It was not a naïve copying of tradition (in the sense of applying tired formulae), but these traditional forms (which are mediated in a truthful way in the atonal artwork) have become untenable. This is the case since historical and social conditions have changed, and, moreover, there has also been the rupture of World War II, which was also a further barbaric step, as theorised in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This is a flaw in Adorno's theorization of the modernist artwork as presented in the *musique informelle* essay.

It is at this point that I would like to quote a passage from Albrecht Wellmer's essay on the potential *alternative* historiography of the modernist musical artwork. In *Endgames. The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity*, Wellmer draws a parallel between Samuel Beckett's plays and what he terms a second line in the history of 'modern music', that

when speaking of the black comedies of Beckett, Adorno says that the sublime and the playful converge in the aesthetic construction of meaninglessness; but this could be understood in a different sense than what Adorno has in mind. It could mean that art makes manifest the play of the world that it converts the realm of history back into a natural realm, and thereby makes it possible to experience

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<sup>923</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Henri Lonitz, and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999), especially the letters concerning Adorno's critique of Benjamin's essay on 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.' See also 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,' and 'Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in Walter Benjamin, *et.al., Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp.3-92; pp. 99-115

the ungroundedness of linguistic meaning not only in its negativity, but also in its productive potential.<sup>924</sup>

For Wellmer, the experience of such art ‘could take the ecstatic form of experiencing a transgression of meaning: this would be an art as an imitation of natural beauty.’ He subsequently avers that a music-historical connection exists, or ‘line of development,’ which ‘links Debussy with Stravinsky, Messiaen and Ligeti.’<sup>925</sup> This music is characterized by a lack of the Hegelian ‘sphere of subjective inwardness’ which ‘externalises itself in sound.’ In contrast, in this music,

*things* themselves are given acoustic expression, that the world is transformed into a realm of sound. By contrast with the finality of a subject-centred temporality, the colour, rhythmic complexity, and spatiality of music are foregrounded in an object-like form that is no longer final; the natural space of history becomes audible, and this is music moving toward the imitation of natural beauty, even if it be a mathematically generated, and thus artificial “natural beauty”, like that of fractals in the case of Ligeti.<sup>926</sup>

For him the crucial element is that this music would still satisfy ‘all the criteria of modernity in Adorno’s sense.’ In this regard he points out that ‘in its language and its technical procedures it is to a high degree constructive and individuated; and it has opened up new layers of material and experience for music, notably from non-European cultures.’ Finally, Wellmer argues that the notion of art imitating natural beauty ‘is Adorno’s own.’ Wellmer is speculating when he suggest that

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<sup>924</sup> Albrecht Wellmer, *Endspiele. Die unversöhnliche Moderne. Essays und Vorträge*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1993); translated by John Cumming, *Endgames. The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity. Essays and Lectures*, (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1998), p. 179

<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid.



one might be tempted to say that all the elements of a post-metaphysical aesthetics of modernity are present in Adorno's work, but that the manner in which they are organized is distorted by the perspective of a philosophy of reconciliation.<sup>927</sup>

As I have suggested before, this critique of Adorno implies a reading *against the grain* of his arguments. Furthermore, I argue that the research into the music of the post-war avant-garde around 1960, as it is concerned with a number of questions of both (aesthetic) philosophical and music-analytic nature, it clearly requires a different, double strategy. Firstly, a form of *reading* the artwork as outlined above; and secondly, a method for analyzing particular compositions by a number of composers which does justice to the works *themselves*, whilst at the same time individuating the philosophical-theoretical framework through this practical method. The latter departs from traditional analysis, which is focused on the parameters, structures and forms of musical works. As I have argued, Adorno himself made the crisis of the traditional work-concept one of the central issues in *Philosophy of New Music*,<sup>928</sup> whilst Borio<sup>929</sup> and others<sup>930</sup> understood this crisis to be necessitating the proposition of an analytic strategy, which draws on the (morphological)<sup>931</sup> analysis of *textures*, as the transformation of global as well as local sound

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<sup>927</sup> Ibid.

<sup>928</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 34: "Today, however, this movement has turned against the closed work and everything that it implies. The sickness that has befallen the idea of the work may stem from the social condition that does not offer what would be binding and confirming enough to guarantee the harmony of the self-sufficient work. The prohibitive difficulties of the work, however, are revealed not in reflection on them but in the dark interior of the work itself."

<sup>929</sup> Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1993), p. 77; Borio also cites Carl Dahlhaus, *Plädoyer für eine romantische Kategorie: Der Begriff des Kunstwerks in der neuesten Musik*, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (1969), pp. 18-22, Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the new music: essays*, (Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 1987). See Chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis

<sup>930</sup> In this regard, the work of Xenakis scholars such as Miha Iliescu, Makis Solomos, Benoît Gibson and Horacio Vaggione, amongst others, on the 'morphology,' self-borrowing, montage and compositional technique in Xenakis' music will also be considered.

<sup>931</sup> See Miha Iliescu, *Musical et extramusical. Eléments de pensée spatiale dans l'oeuvre de Iannis Xenakis*, (Paris, Université de Paris I, 1996), p. 393

complexes over time.<sup>932</sup> Textures in this sense are no longer defined by their place within the fixed totality of the work as before, but by the *transformations* they undergo. This method<sup>933</sup> is therefore not a reductive one (of temporal essences to which all elements of the work can be reduced or linked); rather, it accepts the insights into the changed character of the works themselves, as (often) open-ended. Structure in this sense ‘consists of a constellation of elements, which correlate in different ways,’<sup>934</sup> a reference to the open work, which in Borio’s view necessitated the formation of a new aesthetic of the *(in)formelle*.<sup>935</sup> Crucial to the understanding of

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<sup>932</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*

<sup>933</sup> *Experiential and phenomenological* approaches to the analysis of compositions, as proposed by Evan Jones for the music of Iannis Xenakis, Evan A. Jones, *An Experiential Account of Musical Form in Xenakis's String Quartets*, in *Intimate Voices: Shostakovich to the avant-garde. Dmitri Shostakovich: the string quartets*, Evan A. Jones (ed.) (Rochester, NY, University Rochester Press, 2009), pp.138-156. based on Gilles Naud method, who ‘considers the composer’s own segmentation to comprise only the ‘poietic’ level of an analysis’, whilst of great importance, ignore the importance of the notational aspect of Xenakis’ (and Feldman’s) work, which in the former’s view can be reduced to simple ‘machinery’ (p. 139). It is precisely the ‘nuts and bolts’ that are revealed in an analysis that builds on a study of the score as well as its purely phenomenological aspect as ‘sound-in-space.’ In Jones’ analysis, it becomes clear that his own method is untenable, as it quickly regresses into a ‘dramatic’ type of listening, based on a list of pre-conceived ‘sonic variables’. This addresses precisely the issue of the imposition of categories and concepts (as universals or invariants), as ‘an ‘esthesis’ understanding based on the preferences of experimental subjects’ precisely subjectivises the musical object, instilling it with meaning once again. This approach – the ‘resulting array of articulations and transformations rewards the listener with a complex, multileveled impression of ‘figures’ and ‘grounds,’ of ongoing drama along multiple musical avenues’ – is precisely what Adorno and Benjamin’s approach criticizes. This reification of musical reception, as solipsism, is therefore the opposite of an dialectical *reading* of the musical object, as mediation between object and subject. See Evans, *ibid.*, p. 139. For a phenomenological approach, on the other hand, see Rudolf Frisius, ‘Musik und Technik: Veränderungen des Hörens, Veränderungen im Musikleben’ in Helga De la Motte-Haber, and Rudolf Frisius (ed.), *Musik und Technik : fünf Kongressbeiträge und vier Seminarberichte*. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Neue Musik und Musikerziehung Darmstadt, (Mainz ; New York: Schott, 1996)

<sup>934</sup> The quote is taken from Umberto Eco, *L'informale come opera aperta*, in *Il Verri*, Vol. 3, (1961), pp. 98-127, as cited by Gianmario Borio, *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960 : Entwurf einer Theorie der informellen Musik*, (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag), p. 89

<sup>935</sup> Borio, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Whilst the composers Borio studies can be grouped together as proponents of his aesthetic of *musique informelle*, others, like Xenakis precisely *formalized* their compositional approaches. However, the

this constellational method is its analogy to the cosmological constellation: our eyes, incapable of seeing the difference between the furthest and the closest stars, galaxies, etc. reduce them to a two-dimensional space, much like a painting. On the one hand, it shares the simultaneity of the elements presented in that painting – as if they all appear at the same time, as in Late Medieval paintings, where different stages of Christ’s life appear in the same plane – whilst on the other, the constellation is forever shifting, its centre chosen in a necessarily arbitrary manner, condemned never to present the same image twice. As Adorno<sup>936</sup> himself wrote, with regard to artworks:

Art has its concept in the historically changing constellations of elements. Its essence is not deducible from its origin.<sup>937</sup>

Furthermore, the spatial metaphor of the constellation is conceptual only insofar as it creates a temporary image of the elements under scrutiny: as soon as this relationship ends, the constellation itself is of no use; it does not become a universal tool for analysis, but rather functions like a prism, refracting light into its constituent colours. Its function, then, consists of showing that which was obscured and invisible. In the same sense, a concept cannot be seen to be isolated from the world of objects which it tries to understand, but reorganizes them in such a way that they become intelligible. As I have argued, this way of thinking was possible precisely by taking recourse to ‘thinking-in-images’, as distinct from the conceptual thinking of traditional philosophy. To sum up this point, Sigrid Weigel argues that

this representation in terms of a thought-image of a constellation that is difficult to apprehend conceptually should not be confused with poetic writing, nor is it a supplementary quality of

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transformations of sound complexes, from a global perspective of masses of sounds, is one they share. See Chapter 2

<sup>936</sup> H.-J. Hinrichsen, *Produktive Konstellation: Beethoven und Schubert in der Musikästhetik Theodor W. Adornos*, in *Schubert: Perspektiven*, Vol. 4, No.1, (2004), pp. 86-102.

<sup>937</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 7, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 154

Benjamin's philosophical discourse. Rather, it indicates a mode of philosophizing, which invalidates philosophical discourse as meta-discourse. Benjamin's image-space is not about metaphor – so called figurative or even 'non-literal' (*uneigentlich*) speech – in which an image takes the place of a concept or thought that could also be expressed otherwise.<sup>938</sup>

In Adorno's own words – taken from the inaugural lecture at Frankfurt University in 1931 – philosophy's task is concerned with, on the one hand, interpretation: to momentarily bring together the object it studies with its meaning, in an interpretative, transient act, which can be understood as a *changing* (as opposed to a fixed) constellation. As I have argued, this form of interpretation as reading the works, is a dual strategy: on the one hand it is very close to the task Adorno sets for philosophy, whilst at the same time allowing for a reading of these same works in (music-)technical terms. In the following passage, Adorno refers to this as riddle-solving – the riddle at the heart of the objects (including the artwork) to be *read*:

**Authentic** philosophic interpretation [*echte philosophische Deutung*] does not engage with a fixed meaning already lying behind the question, but lights it up suddenly and momentarily, and consumes it at the same time. Just as riddle-solving is constituted, in that singular and dispersed elements of the question are brought into various groupings long enough for them to close together in a figure out of which the solution springs forth, while the question disappears – so philosophy has to bring its elements, which it receives from the sciences, into changing constellations, or, to say it with less astrological and scientifically more current expression, into changing experimental setups (*Versuchsanordnungen*), until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears.<sup>939</sup>

On the other hand, philosophy is not completely the same as riddle-solving, however:

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<sup>938</sup> Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and image-space : re-reading Walter Benjamin*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 10

<sup>939</sup> 'The Actuality of Philosophy,' in Adorno, T.W. and B. O'Connor, *The Adorno reader*. (Blackwell Readers), (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), p. 32-33

The task of philosophy is not to search for concealed and manifest intentions of reality, but to interpret unintentional reality, in that, by the power of constructing figures, or images (*Bilder*), out of the isolated elements of reality it sublates (*aufhebt*) questions, the exact articulation of which is the task of science, a task to which philosophy always remains bound, because its power of illumination is not able to catch fire otherwise than on these solid questions.<sup>940</sup>

It remains therefore the task of the musicologist to find the particular reading strategy for each of these works as they present themselves. The dialectics between the works studied in the next chapters and their interpretation can only be revealed *in situ*, and at the time of their analysis. At the level of the works, an image-like aspect of their composition, and their interpretation in the form of an image, can be seen as both a critical reading, but at the same time the distance to the object under scrutiny must be kept open. The reading of the works in terms of *images* must also avoid dismissing elements incongruent to this reading, e.g. the other mediations at work. To discover these aspects of their form and eventually their temporal structure, the radical shift to a study of *textures* could reveal reifications in the facets of these compositions. For example, I will argue that Xenakis often generates textures by means of stochastic procedures; however, as presented in the score of *Duel*, a work entirely based on self-borrowed material originating from these stochastic procedures, this does not result in a static, *ever-same* work. In that sense, the required analytic *openness* of the reading must take into account an expanded notion of the object, as constituted locally (as a composed *texture*) and globally, as an element in a changing constellations of these textures. This means that Borio's idea of a sound-object could be expanded, as the work of composers he qualifies as *informel*, and composers like Xenakis, draw on this notion. As I will argue momentarily, on the one hand, Feldman's artistic programme described in *Between Categories*, and on the other, Xenakis' philosophy of music, both form part of

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<sup>940</sup> Ibid., p. 33

a dialectic of the material beyond the pitch-centred conceptualization of Adorno's aesthetics. However, in light of the theory of language of objects, and the reading of the works as dialectical images, a new insight in both the temporality of music and its spatialization in these works will reveal a different facet of the history of modernist music.







**PART II: The Spatialisation of Musical Time in the Music of Varèse,  
Feldman and Xenakis**



**CHAPTER 5: Edgar Varèse's Approach to Space and Time in *Intégrales* (1925)**



## Introduction

This chapter explores the compositional approach and the music of Edgard Varèse, whose compositions can be fruitfully read by employing the strategy proposed in the previous chapter. Varèse was known to Adorno<sup>941</sup> and his wider influence on the two other composers discussed in the thesis, Morton Feldman and Iannis Xenakis, cannot be underestimated. More generally, Edgard Varèse has been regarded as one of the most influential pioneers of ‘spatialized’ music – music which not only takes into account the space in which it is performed, but integrates this notion of musical space into the fabric of the composition. In order to explicate his aesthetics, I principally draw on the work of three eminent scholars, including Jonathan W. Bernard,<sup>942</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber<sup>943</sup> and Thimothée Horodyski.<sup>944</sup> Their individual work illuminates certain aspects of the work of Varèse; however, it is only by bringing together these readings with the works themselves, in light of the theoretical considerations in the previous chapters, that the actual content can be revealed. One of the central works which illuminates the question of the image-like aspect of musical works of art, where the temporal and spatial aspects are not only interwoven but take centre stage, is undoubtedly Varèse’s *Intégrales* (1923-1925) for woodwinds,

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<sup>941</sup> In fact, Adorno writes in generally positive terms of Varèse démarche, as a composer who, as a trained engineer, was able to import ‘technological elements into his compositions not in order to make them some kind of childish science, but to make room for the expression of just those kinds of tension that the aged New Music forfeits. He uses technology for effects of panic that go far beyond run-of-the-mill musical resources.’ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Ageing of New Music,’ in *Essays*, p. 194.

<sup>942</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*, (Composers of the Twentieth Century) (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987)

<sup>943</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, *Die Musik von Edgard Varèse: Studien zu seinen nach 1918 entstandenen Werke*, (Hofheim, Wolke, 1993)

<sup>944</sup> Thimothée Horodyski, *Varèse. Héritage et confluences. Les masses sonores, l'espace du son, la spatialisation*, (Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000) and Thimothée Horodyski, Philippe Lalitte, and Musicologie et créations musicales Equipe d'accueil Esthétiques, *Edgard Varèse. Du son organisé aux arts audio. [Actes Du Colloque, Paris, Université Paris 8, 30-31 Mars 2006]*, (Arts 8) (Paris, l'Harmattan, 2007)

brass, and percussion.<sup>945</sup> It plays a rather important role in the development of new approaches to musical composition,<sup>946</sup> by linking tendencies in the work of earlier composers – such as Richard Strauss, specifically his *Salome*<sup>947</sup> – and the future works, amongst others,<sup>948</sup> of the composers named above. This discussion will consist of a number of analytic remarks on *Intégrales*, as seen against the background of Varèse's wider oeuvre and compositional considerations, both of a technical and aesthetic nature. Apart from *Intégrales*, the project of the Philips Pavilion, for which Varèse composed his *Poème électronique*, will also be highlighted, especially the collaboration<sup>949</sup> with Iannis Xenakis,<sup>950</sup> who designed the Pavilion<sup>951</sup> and composed

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<sup>945</sup> Other important works of similar importance include *Ionisation* (1931). See Chou Wen-Chung, 'Ionisation: The Function of Timbre in its Formal and Temporal Organization,' in Sherman Van Solkema (ed.) *The New Worlds of Edgard Varèse. A Symposium*, (I.S.A.M. Monographs: No 11), (Brooklyn, 1979), p. 27-74

<sup>946</sup> Other than the three scholars mentioned above, the French theorists François-Bernard Mâche and Gilles Tremblay have published an analysis: 'Analyse d'*Intégrales* par François-Bernard Mâche et par Gilles Tremblay,' in *Varèse, vingt ans après...*, La Revue musicale, triple number 383-384-385 (December 1985), p. 111-123

<sup>947</sup> For a discussion of this connection, see Helga de la Motte-Haber, 'Blurred Traces: Varèse's Years in Berlin,' in *Edgard Varèse. Composer, Sound Sculptor, Visionary*, F.M.a.H. Zimmermann (ed.), The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2006, p. 40-43

<sup>948</sup> Other composers influenced by *Intégrales* include Olivier Messiaen, see below.

<sup>949</sup> In the same *Revue musicale* mentioned above, Xenakis sheds light on the practical spect as well as some personal matters regarding this work. 'Varèse et Xenakis,' in *La Revue musicale*, triple number 383-384-385 (December 1985), p. 221-224; see also Bart Lootsma, 'Een ode van Philips aan de vooruitgang,' in *Wonen TABK*, No. 2, (1984), p. 10-17; German translation in 'Poème électronique: Le Corbusier, Xenakis, Varèse,' in T.Kesseler, A.Vowinckel (eds.), *Le Corbusier Synthèse des Arts, Aspekte des Spätwerks 1945-1965*, (Karlsruhe, Bad. Kunstverein, 1986), pp. 111-147

<sup>950</sup> On the relationship between Varèse and Xenakis, see Olivia Mattis, *Edgard Varèse and the Visual Arts*, (PhD Thesis, Stanford University, 1992), pp. 247-255; see also Konrad Boehmer, 'Welle und Klippe. Xenakis und Varèse,' in *1991 Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik*, 1991, pp. 89-101

<sup>951</sup> See Iannis Xenakis, 'Genèse de l'architecture du Pavillon,' in *Revue Technique Philips*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1958-59), pp. 1-11; 'L'architecture du Pavillon,' in Charles Edouard Le Corbusier, *Le poème électronique*, (Paris, Minuit, 1958); Iannis Xenakis, 'The architectural design of Le Corbusier and Xenakis,' in *Philips Technical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1958-59), pp. 2-8

an electroacoustic work of his own for it, *Concret PH.*<sup>952</sup> The aim of this inquiry is to develop a practical method, based on the one hand on the technical insights in the score, and on the other hand an aesthetic consideration of Varèse's technique in light of the category of the dialectical image. Concretely, this means that a constellation of elements of a practical and a theoretical level may appear, allowing for an aesthetic exploration along Benjaminian and Adornian lines of this particular branch of modernism.

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<sup>952</sup> Iannis Xenakis, 'Le Corbusiers *Elektronisches Gedicht* / Le Corbusier's *Electronic Poem* —the Philips Pavilion,' in *Gravesaner Blätter* n°9, 1957, p. 43-50/51-54; partially reprinted in Iannis Xenakis *Musique. Architecture*, (Tournai, Casterman, 1971), pp. 123-142

### Spatialization in *Intégrales*

As Jonathan Bernard argues, the defining characteristics of Western music, space and time, may seem self-evident; they were taken for granted by the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>953</sup> When Western music began to change

more rapidly and violently than it had ever done before, one thing that became clear almost immediately was that the effects of these changes would be first and most strongly felt in the domains of space and time [...].<sup>954</sup>

He avers that ‘there can be no doubt that Edgard Varèse played a leading role in this revision, from the 1920s right through his last works ca. 1960.’<sup>955</sup> In the above passage, building on his ground-breaking book-length study of Varèse’s music,<sup>956</sup> Jonathan Bernard points out that the meaning of ‘space’ in a musical context is to most musicians ‘first and foremost, *performance* space: a concert hall of widely varying dimensions, which may be used conventionally or in any number of unconventional ways.’<sup>957</sup> However, for Varèse this ‘was not the principal sense in which his music was spatial’; this other meaning of spatiality ‘resides in the inner workings of the pieces he wrote for conventional instruments.’<sup>958</sup> Although he rationalizes the commission of *Poème électronique* as ‘unique’ in that it was composed for a particular space – the Philips Pavilion at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels – he nonetheless argues that other works display an *internal* space.<sup>959</sup> In the case of *Intégrales* (1925), Varèse composed the work according to the

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<sup>953</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, *Varèse's Space, Varèse's Time*, in *Edgard Varèse. Composer, Sound Sculptor, Visionary*, F.M. a. H. Zimmermann (ed.), (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006), p. 149

<sup>954</sup> Ibid.

<sup>955</sup> Ibid.

<sup>956</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, 1987

<sup>957</sup> Ibid. For this literal aspect of acoustic space, Bernard refers to Henry Brant, ‘Space as an essential Aspect of Musical Composition,’ in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 223-243

<sup>958</sup> Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 149-150

<sup>959</sup> Ibid.



conception of a ‘changing projection of a geometrical figure on a plane, with both figure and plane moving in space, but each with its own arbitrary and varying speeds of translation and rotation.’<sup>960</sup>

For another scholar who devoted a considerable book-length study to Varèse’s work, Helga de la Motte-Haber, the spatial dimension in Varèse’s music is not only a crucial dimension, it is also innovative:

The ways in which Varèse imagines musical space are closely connected with his new thinking about sound. From the outside, this statement always implies, simultaneously, the liberation of sound and the idea of spatial music, which are addressed in his theoretical texts. [...] In a lecture of 1959 dedicated in the narrow sense to spatial music, Varèse at least indirectly addressed what he regarded as an important anti-systematic connection of his sounds.<sup>961</sup>

What de la Motte-Haber refers to in the above quotation is the idea that no overarching system of composition in the sense of a spatial music, is crucial for Varèse.

In Varèse’s *Intégrales*, the traditional musical fabric is transformed from a linear sequence of motifs, melodies, harmony and rhythm played by a number of instruments, to a three-dimensional spatial projection of sounds. Space in Varèse’s ‘sound world is primarily a matter of vertical compass, of the highest and lowest pitches heard at any given time, and of fluctuating

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<sup>960</sup> Edgard Varèse, ‘Mind over Music,’ radio interview with Fred Grunfeld, WQXR (New York), 13 November 1953, as cited by Frederic Waldman, ‘Edgar Varèse: an Appreciation,’ *Julliard Review* 1/3, (Fall 1954), p. 3-10 and Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>961</sup> De la Motte, *op. cit.*, p. 111. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (eds.), *Edgard Varèse. Rückblick auf die Zukunft. Musik-Konzepte* 6, Munich, 1978: ‘Die musikalischen Raumvorstellungen von Varèse sind mit seinem neuartigen Klangdenken eng verbunden. Rein äußerlich tut sich dies darin kund, daß in seinen theoretischen Texten immer zugleich die Befreiung des Klangs und die Idee der spatialen musik angesprochen werden. [...] In der im engeren Sinn der Spatialen Musik 1959 gewidmeten Vorlesung hielt es Varèse für wichtig, wenigstens ‘nebenbei’ auf die nicht-systemliche Bindung seiner Klänge einzugehen.’

density of the instrumental parts operating within these boundaries.<sup>962</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, writes in 'Blurred Traces: Varèse's Years in Berlin' how precisely Varèse achieved his spatial compositional goal. She considers that 'the impression of distance and proximity, echo and *lontano* effects, can easily be achieved in music by means of dynamics.' Furthermore, 'crescendos and decrescendos in contrary motion – an effect often found in Varèse's music – even make it possible to create a space intrinsic to the music itself, in which sounds seem to protrude into the foreground or recede into the background by becoming louder or softer at different times. This device is also found in the scores of Richard Strauss.'<sup>963</sup> Varèse's approach can indeed be seen to have been inspired by composers like Strauss, as well as Claude Debussy. In their music, however, 'dynamic processes in contrary motion, besides causing a colouristic effect, usually serve to make the musical fabric more fluid.'<sup>964</sup> This is achieved by generating a 'sensation of interweaving that transcends the metrical pulse,' and indeed Varèse, too, in addition to the intended spatial effects, 'used contrapuntal dynamics in this way in order to impart shape to time.' In *Ionisation* (1929-1931),<sup>965</sup> for example, the 'predominant 4/4 meter of the notation merely serves as a scaffold to contain what is happening.'<sup>966</sup>

This 'imparting of shape to time' is a revealing comment, if understood from a philosophical point as an attempt to reveal the connection between space and time, or to paraphrase Bergson, to mould the moments and stretch them out (in a sense creating a continuity between instants). From a dialectical point of view, the temporal *universal* is here subtly undermined and gradually

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<sup>962</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, *op. cit.*

<sup>963</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, 'Varèse's Years in Berlin,' in *op. cit.*, p. 40

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>965</sup> See Jean-Charles François, 'Organization of Scattered Timbral Qualities: A Look at Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*,' in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Winter 1991), p. 48–79

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid.*

integrated with the spatial element. De la Motte-Haber explains this in her book on Varèse in more detail (see the ‘haptic dimension’ of his music).<sup>967</sup> For her a third, spatial dimension is present in Varèse’s work, already fixed ‘to tones because of their tactile quality.’<sup>968</sup> This describes what de la Motte terms the *plastic* elements of the experience of sounds, which traditionally are not seen as central characteristics of sounds. Other central notions, such as the interval, acquire new meanings:

The interval content of a sound [*Klang*] no longer uses the systemic, abstract properties of a tone, but its immediate physical qualities which arise from both narrower and wider proportions, as well as from the degrees to which they blend. The two fifths, on which the last sound of *Intégrales* sits (f-c-g), anchor the end on a rounded, voluminous foundation.<sup>969</sup>

According to de la Motte, to qualify further this third dimension, the use of metaphoric language pertaining to the visual, is required: ‘Brightness, roughness, density and volume are metaphors from the visual field that are not just the description of the corporeal nature of the sound, but can also be used to characterize its colour.’<sup>970</sup> What this seemingly obvious descriptive terminology sets it apart from mere banality, lies precisely in the fact that the richness of colour is traditionally reduced to a single salient feature.<sup>971</sup> Varèse’s music is hard to qualify in the sense of (linear) harmonic progressions, which are adaptable for describing or analyzing the way in

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<sup>967</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, *Varèse*, p. 122

<sup>968</sup> Ibid.: ‘Bereits an Tönen haftet durch ihre haptische Qualität eine dritte räumliche Dimension.’

<sup>969</sup> Ibid.: ‘Der Intervallaufbau eines Klangs benutzt nicht mehr die systemlichen abstrakten Eigenschaften eines Tones, sondern seine unmittelbaren sinnlichen Qualitäten, die sich sowohl aus engeren und weiteren Verhältnissen ergeben als auch aus ihren Verschmelzungsgraden.. Die beiden Quinten, auf denen der letzte Klang von *Intégrales* ruht (f-c-g), verankern den Schluß in einem abgerundeten voluminösen Fundament.’

<sup>970</sup> Ibid.: ‘Helligkeit, Rauigkeit, Dichte und Volumen sind Metaphern aus dem visuellen Bereich, die nicht nur der Beschreibung der Körperlichen Beschaffenheit des Klanges, sondern auch zur Charakterisierung seiner Farbe benutzt werden können.’

<sup>971</sup> Ibid.: ‘Die traditionelle Musiktheorie filtert aus diesem bunten Spektrum ein lineares eindimensionales Merkmal heraus, die Rauigkeit, um mit der Harmonielehre Fortschrittsregeln für Klänge formulieren zu können. Dagegen spielt sich die musik von Varèse in vielen Dimensionen ab, in die sich Klänge bewegen können.’

which his sounds move in many dimensions. The way in which this haptic dimension evokes a third dimension – with impressions of nearness and at distance – is through respectively low and high pitches and dynamics of loud and soft. Again, this is not so different from the traditional use of dynamics, however, its *function* is rather different. According to de la Motte, for actual spatial effects Varèse drew inspiration above all from the scores of Gustav Mahler; at the same time, however, ‘for all their similarity of technique, the two composers pursued quite different aesthetic ends.’<sup>972</sup> De la Motte suggests that there are further similarities, specifically the last scene of *Salome* and the opening of *Intégrales*<sup>973</sup> especially from a dynamic point of view. Moreover, Varèse usually avoided stylistic allusions when recasting traditional building-blocks. The similarity of these two passages is suggested by the relation of line to sound, as dynamics *shaped* within the temporal process, and by the fact that the sound seems to distend when it gets louder and to shrink when it gets softer, as ‘even the repetitions reinforce the feeling of similarity.’<sup>974</sup>

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<sup>972</sup> Helga De la Motte, ‘Varèse’s Years in Berlin,’ p. 42

<sup>973</sup> See Helga de la Motte-Haber, p. 42: ‘Varèse’s admiration of the conclusion of *Salome* tends to suggest that he may also have been directly influenced by Strauss’ treatment of dynamics. However, this was creatively redefined in the process of assimilation. Shortly before the ‘exhausted’ (*ermattet*) Salome sings ‘Ah, ich habe Deinen Mund geküßt, Jochanaan’ (2mm. before no. 355), we sense at first hearing a striking similarity to the introduction of *Intégrales*, not least in the handling of the dynamics. The considerable difference in shrillness of timbre is not a consideration, in view of the rapid development of New Music in the fifteen years that separate these two pieces.’

<sup>974</sup> Ibid.

# INTÉGRALES

for 11 Wind Instruments and Percussion

Andantino (♩ = 72)

1) M = Membrane (head); R = Rebord (rim); C = Caisse (shell). 2) > = frapper; ≡ = agiter; ♯ = avec le ponce.

Figure 11: Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales* (1925), p. 1

Furthermore, according to de la Motte, however, the two composers had different aims.<sup>975</sup> On the one hand, Strauss embeds a fragment of a melody in a 'darker' texture which appears to 'inflate'<sup>976</sup>:

Line and sound form a single continuous process, mediated by the first flute and the clarinet: the alien-sounding melody lends linguistic significance to the following sonority as it emerges from layers of darkness.<sup>977</sup>

In this context, whilst the spatial effects may have been conceived as integral to the composition, they remain mere 'physical effects' as they are played on an organ, off-stage. For de la Motte, in this regard

The elongation of line into sonority is a motif that permeates the entire opera and is meant to be viewed as a distinct entity. This is shown with greater clarity in several earlier passages, where the libretto speaks of dark caverns or mentions Jochanaan's curse (rehearsal nos. 77 and 150).<sup>978</sup>

Varèse, too, frequently uses this device of equating the horizontal and the vertical by splitting the music into high and low registers. In *Intégrales*, the pressure on the figure d 2 - a b 2 - b b 2 in the Eb clarinet is raised to such a degree at its second occurrence that it generates the pitches e b - a - b as an enveloping nimbus that vanishes in the quivering b b . Set apart from this loud process in the foreground we hear the trombones, at first softly, then in crescendo, forcing their way into the foreground, and then receding once again into the background. Both their dynamic progression and their register (C - c # as opposed to a1-b2) keep them separate from the figure in the Eb clarinet.

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<sup>975</sup> Ibid., p. 42

<sup>976</sup> Ibid.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid.

<sup>978</sup> *ibid.*

Figure 12: Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales*, p. 1, b. 4-6<sup>979</sup>

In an interview with Fred Grunfeld, Varèse spoke of two functions entering a mutual relation. He told the listeners to

Visualize the changing projection of a geometrical figure on a plane, with both plane and figure moving in space, but each with its own arbitrary and varying speeds of translation and rotation. The instantaneous form of the projection is determined by the relative orientation between the figure and the plane at the moment.<sup>980</sup>

Before I turn to the different functions of the use of dynamics, it can be argued that *Intégrales* contains a process similar to the one in *Salome*; as de la Motte writes it is a ‘horizontal progression deflected into the vertical dimension.’<sup>981</sup> Within the context of an expanding sonority, however, the original idea of ‘the continuous prolongation of a figure is turned into its opposite.’<sup>982</sup> In other words, the figure which appears in this architecture of sonority, the dynamics – the ‘crescendo-plus-decrescendo shape’ – articulates the temporal unfolding of the

<sup>979</sup> For a discussion of this passage, see also Timothée Horodysky, *op. cit.*, p. 160

<sup>980</sup> Interview with Fred Grunfeld, Radio WQXR on 13 December 1953, as cited in Jonathan Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987), p. 7

<sup>981</sup> Ibid.

<sup>982</sup> Ibid.

sounds, and achieves a spatial effect at the same time. In spatial terms, the movement of a plane, which de la Motte sees as being furnished by the trombones, is contrasted with a 'figure' that 'moves forwards, upwards, and downwards,'<sup>983</sup> resulting in a tension which underpins the entire piece. There is no longer a sense that anything is being expressed, what occurs are 'sound processes that create an awareness of structures in tonal space.'<sup>984</sup> This 'physically multi-dimensional expression' might be termed, to borrow a phrase from Dieter Schnebel, a 'language of vibrant air.'<sup>985</sup> De la Motte concludes that upon closer inspection, the initial similarities of *Intégrales* to *Salome* are deceptive, but nevertheless have a *raison d'être*. She questions whether Varèse was even 'particularly capable of perceiving the idiosyncrasies of Strauss' music.'<sup>986</sup> However, the references to earlier music, via the borrowing of certain technical *procedures*, have another function: Varèse makes abstraction from their specific context in order to re-assemble the constituent parametric ideas (such as dynamics) in different ways. Their goal is the reorientation of these musical means towards the idea that music should be understood more as a spatial art, and no longer an art whose content unfolds solely in time. The play between the sound masses conveys a different sort of movement, one which is no longer based on the manipulation of melodies, or even pitches, but through a variation of the dynamic, movement is created in a different way.

Another interesting aspect of Varèse's music is the way in which he borrows from his own work, something we will also encounter in the music of Iannis Xenakis. For example, in *Amériques* and *Arcana*, Varèse borrowed material from *Offrandes*. However, Varèse did not treat such borrowings

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<sup>983</sup> Ibid.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid.

<sup>985</sup> Dieter Schnebel, 'Der körperliche Klang: zu Edgard Varèse und seiner Musik,' in Metzger and Riehn, *Varèse*, p.

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<sup>986</sup> Ibid.



as *objets trouvés* to place them in new contexts.<sup>987</sup> What counted for Varèse was how borrowings were treated, as *musical* material, regardless of its extramusical origins. The sonorous qualities were paramount, whilst the structural function they could play was of equal importance. In order to achieve this structural role, they had to be generalized. In other words, the modernist technique of alienating materials from their origins, including traditional instrumentation, became one of Varèse's well-known innovations – think for example of the use of the siren in *Amérique*. The historical element encoded in the use of the siren as a device to warn or signal, can be seen to have lost its immediate function. However, it reappears transformed in the music as another sound source or *sound object*. Consequently, this could be understood as the highlighting of the mediation of the artwork with history and society, in a way other orchestral instruments are no longer capable of achieving this degree of tension.<sup>988</sup>

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<sup>987</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, 'Varèse's Years in Berlin,' *op. cit.*, p. 43

<sup>988</sup> The inclusion of new instruments into the orchestra – as an institution – was often criticized. See John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra. History of an Institution, 1650-1815*, (Oxford; New York, OUP, 2004)

### **Intégrales: analytic remarks**

As John Strawn points out in his analysis of *Intégrales*,<sup>989</sup> it is no longer relevant to approach a musical composition with an inherently pitch-based search for fundamental motifs and their varied presentation and repetition, but to integrate such varied elements as timbre, spacing and projection of sound within the ensemble of eleven wind instruments and percussion. Although superficial relations between ‘masses’ – loosely defined as ‘groups of sound’ – can be found,<sup>990</sup> it becomes clear that this material is in fact part of an ever-changing image of what Strawn (with Varèse) calls a ‘process of crystallization.’<sup>991</sup> The idea of ‘masses’ here is somewhat misleading – especially with Iannis Xenakis’ use of more global sound masses in mind – as these consist of small groups of instruments which, together, make up the fabric of the music at any given moment. The individual ‘masses’ represent strictly distinguished pitched and non-pitched sounds; in that sense, it is their precise juxtaposition that leads to a particular ‘integral’ or global sound (which resemble the idea of the *sound-object*). To take Varèse’s metaphor of the block of granite further, its texture is therefore ‘grained,’ a combination of different-sized crystals.<sup>992</sup>

Strawn describes the first ‘mass’ as follows:

- measures 1-25 :       clarinet I
- m. 10-11:             trumpet II
- m. 12-13, 19:       oboe
- m. 18-21:            trumpet I

However, Mass 1 is juxtaposed with Mass 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6:

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<sup>989</sup> John Strawn, ‘The Intégrales of Edgard Varèse Space, Mass, Element, and Form,’ in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 17 No. 1, (1978), pp. 138-160

<sup>990</sup> See John Strawn’s two Tables, the first of which distinguishes between 110 unique ‘masses,’ the second shows 13 ‘superficially’ related groups of ‘masses.’ (p. 147)

<sup>991</sup> John Strawn, *op. cit.*, p. 155

<sup>992</sup> The word *granite* comes from the Latin *granum*, a grain, which refers to the coarse-grained structure of this type of crystalline rock.

- m. 4-23:                   gong, tam-tam, triangle, crash cymbal, cymbals (except m. 8)
- m. 16-20:               suspended cymbal
- m. 16-17               bass drum

As Varèse himself explained regarding the formation of crystals as a *process*, this is the realization in musical terms of an idea, the basis of an internal structure expanded and split into different shapes or groups of sound constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces. The form of the work is the consequence of this interaction.<sup>993</sup>

As Jonathan Bernard argues, Varèse uses analogies with physical objects or processes, not merely because explanations in visual terms are often easier to grasp:

His appropriation of a mineralogist's definition of crystallization to illustrate the general way in which his pieces took shape ('the consequence of the interaction of attractive and repulsive forces and the ordered packing of the atom')<sup>994</sup> or his evocation of 'opposing planes and volumes' to characterize the progressive effect of *Déserts* (1949-50) seems calculated to further our understanding of what is going on in this music at a very basic level.<sup>995</sup>

The sound masses are modified, as Strawn shows in his comparative Table II, 'every time it penetrates into the listener's field of hearing, by a process in which various elements are added or removed, this being the manner in which elements contribute to the process of form.'<sup>996</sup> The elements themselves are not brought together in an arbitrary fashion, but through a principle of 'chromatic expansion' of the pitch content of a certain element. This occasionally builds to an

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<sup>993</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', in E. Schwartz and B. Childs, p. 203

<sup>994</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', *op. cit.*, p. 201-204. According to Bernard, this passage is taken from a lecture Varèse gave at Princeton University on 4 September 1959, entitled 'Autobiographical Remarks'; In Schwartz and Childs this lecture received a new title: 'Rhythm, Form and Content.' Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>995</sup> Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>996</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155

aggregate comprising almost all 12 notes of the chromatic scale, as for example in m. 28, where eleven different pitches sound in the eleven instruments.

While the ear is shown to synthesize the changes in timbre – certain sounds are passed between instruments in a way that their transition comes close to a momentary fusing or blending of their individual timbres – the sound is also made to travel around, creating the illusion of distance via a differentiation of the dynamics (as I have already argued following Helga de la Motte). However, Varèse deliberately avoids any homogeneity of sound, which would be too reminiscent of nineteenth-century approaches to the handling of sonority and texture, with frequent doublings in different instruments. As Jonathan Bernard explains, Varèse favoured ensembles that allowed him to use ‘as much of the audible sound spectrum to work with as possible: piccolos in their highest register, double basses and low brass in their lowest.’<sup>997</sup> In Varèse’s work ensemble writing was ‘confined almost entirely to wind instruments and percussion [...], for the sake of promoting clarity and focus of sound in the extreme registers [...] yielding a more definite impression of music filling and traversing vast spaces.’<sup>998</sup> Sounds can be passed not only to other wind instruments, but also to the percussion instruments, where their pitch content is momentarily suspended and weighed against their rhythmic functioning. In other words, the rotation of sounds between the instruments is rather based on their sonorous qualities than on the completion of a (dodecaphonic) series of pitches. Analyses that do not take into account the role of the percussion instruments<sup>999</sup> and simply focus on whether or not Varèse completes the chromatic scale, obviously disregard the sharing of material between the instruments, including non-pitched percussion.

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<sup>997</sup> Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.* p. 150

<sup>998</sup> Ibid.

<sup>999</sup> Larry Stempel, ‘Varèse’s “Awkwardness” and the Symmetry in the “Frame of 12 Tones”: An Analytic Approach,’ in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2, (1979), p. 148-166

With regard to Adorno's critical theory of the modernist artwork, and in light of an aesthetics of *musique informelle*, certain tendencies in Varèse's compositional approach in *Intégrales* can be considered to be crucial. In particular, Varèse's alternative to reified compositional technique – which could be termed *anti-systematic* – is paramount in this perspective. In two different ways, Varèse avoided replacing one system with another: neither would the traditional *tonal* space be refilled with an *atonal* system, nor would the blending of timbres be fitted to measure a *series* of timbres (as in the future integral serialism). In terms of the non-homogeneous treatment of timbre, Varèse would attempt to achieve the highest degree of 'non-blending' of the instruments as he called it, establishing 'zones of intensities' in his instrumentation and, according to Bernard, 'thus using timbre as an agent of differentiation.'<sup>1000</sup> Bernard argues that to Varèse both can be seen as

characterized by an intellectual orderliness which boxes itself in through the internal symmetry of its parts. It precludes leaving any space for that 'awkwardness,' that untidy openness which Varèse prized in a work of art. I think the caveat on the codification of closed systems is Varèse at his most genuine.<sup>1001</sup>

Varèse's interest in the architectonic qualities of blocks of granite is instrumental to the understanding of his conception of these works based on the use of sound masses, as well as how they contribute to the construction of musical form. In this regard, Varèse had a unique perspective on both rhythm and musical form:

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<sup>1000</sup> Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 150. Bernard quotes from Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', *op. cit.*, p. 196-198. The above passage is from a lecture given at Mary Austin House, Santa Fe, 23 August 1936, entitled 'Music and Times'; in Schwartz and Childs it is given the new title 'New Instruments and New Music.'

<sup>1001</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154. Without recourse to simplification or conceptual reduction, Adorno's criticism of totalizing systems, which ultimately take their own existence and functioning for granted, runs parallel to Varèse's reluctance of precisely this particular modernist credo of 'total' system-building.

Rhythm is too often confused with metrics [...] In my own works, for instance, rhythm derives from the simultaneous interplay of unrelated elements that intervene at calculated, but not regular, time-lapses [...] Form is a result – *the* result of a process. Each of my works discovers its own form.<sup>1002</sup>

Form in this respect is a result of the combination of these masses and elements – created from the bottom up. In that sense, form as such is not a tool, scheme or method to be applied to a chaotic source of sounds, but a concept which brings the individual elements, the groups of sounds or masses, to bear on the global conception of the work.

The work of Horodyski on Varèse appears to support an important aspect of the reading strategy of modernist artworks in the way I have proposed. Her critique, as I will show, reveals the inadequacy of former analytic approaches to his work, by either reductive approaches (Bernard), or fragmentary ones (Strawn). In this sense, a reading of this work in light of the dialectical image, where the aspects of the composition hitherto relegated, abstracted, or reduced appear anew, can be found in her work. It is concerned with the complex relation of spatialization (as de la Motte also argues) and the issue of time. In this sense, an important aspect of *Intégrales* is revealed in Horodyski's analysis. The first question she asks is 'how Varèse occupies and divides space?'<sup>1003</sup> This question reveals on the one hand the notion of the outer *limits* of the individual masses (their intervallic *range*); on the other, it is important to look at the internal organization of the details – the study of intervallic *content*, which constitutes in her view 'one of the access points to the material, especially since the composer asserts it himself, and the form results from the specific density of [these] contents.'<sup>1004</sup>

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<sup>1002</sup> John Strawn, *op. cit.*, p. 202-203

<sup>1003</sup> Timothée Horodyski, *op. cit.*, p. 113: 'L'étude du contenu intervallique constitue donc une des portes d'accès au matériau, d'autant plus que le compositeur l'affirme lui-même, la forme résulte de la densité du contenu.'

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid.

In her inquiry, Horodyski explores the limitations of the analytic approach of Jonathan Bernard. Although this work carries the approval of Chou Wen-Chung, an important conductor and scholar of Varèse's work,<sup>1005</sup> Horodyski finds Bernard's work on the contrary to be occasionally arbitrary in its method. In its reliance on pitch-set class analysis – as developed by Allen Forte and Milton Babbitt – the criterium of the relative importance of certain intervals which achieve *structural* relevance, it is purely based on the measurement of how frequently they appear. Secondly, this analysis is limited as it is based on grouping and analyzing configurations of *three* pitches. For Bernard, the basic configuration of  $g\sharp - b - g\flat$  is essential to understanding the whole composition.

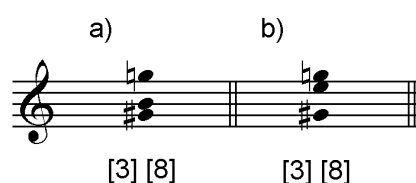


Figure 13: *Intégrales*, structural chords (Bernard), set classes [3] and [8]<sup>1006</sup>

Whilst permitting the definition of spatial configurations based on intervallic pairs, it exclusively studies these relations between the three pitches.

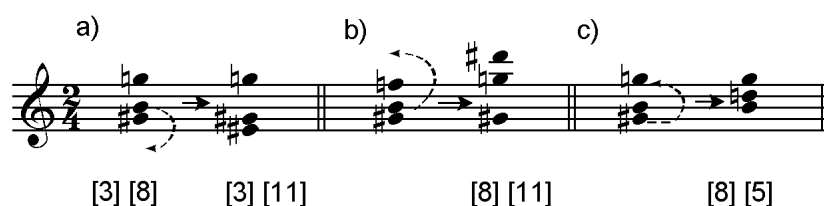


Figure 14: Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales*, intervallic pairs (Bernard)<sup>1007</sup>

In Horodyski's estimations, it is here that Bernard's analysis falls short, as he 'analyses relations of configurations of three pitches which we consider not to have appropriate significance.'<sup>1008</sup>

<sup>1005</sup> Chou Wen-chung, 'Ionisation: The Function of Timbre in Its Formal and Temporal Organization,' in *The New Worlds of Edgard Varèse*, Sherman Van Solkema (ed.), (Brooklyn, Institute for Studies in American Music, 1979), pp. 26-74

<sup>1006</sup> See Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 74

<sup>1007</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74

The choice of basic configurations of three notes, one constituting a model, with two variations, one an expansion and one a contraction, is therefore arbitrary.



Figure 15: Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales*, basic configuration, expansions and contraction (Horodyski)<sup>1009</sup>

In a section of her book on Varèse, *Form as a resultant of a process*, Horodyski understands *Intégrales* as a key work for the understanding of his technique. Referring to the influence of cubist artistic technique on his work, especially on the conception of form, another important notion is revealed in the confrontation with a definition of music by Hoene Wronskyas ‘the embodiment of consciousness in the sounds [themselves]’<sup>1010</sup> ‘Thanks to this fundamental idea, Varèse declared that ‘I started to conceive of music as being spatial, like moving sonorous bodies in space, a conception I developed gradually and made my own.’<sup>1011</sup> The test case [*oeuvre laboratoire*] for this theory of musical spatiality is generally understood to be *Intégrales*, as shown in the work of several generations of analysts, each understanding the work from a different perspective, using their own concepts and categories. As Horodyski argues, these include analyses focusing on the segmentation of the work.<sup>1012</sup> These opt for a view of the work as *instantaneous* and *immobile*, and are presented in ‘contradiction with the notion of evolution and the temporal

<sup>1008</sup> ‘Il arrive que Bernard analyse des rapports de configurations de trois sons dont nous estimons qu’elles n’ont pas de signification pertinente.’ p. 113-114

<sup>1009</sup> Horodyski, *op. cit.*, p. 116

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid.. ‘corporification de l’intelligence qui est dans les sons.’

<sup>1011</sup> ‘Grâce à elle, je commençai à concevoir la musique comme étant spatiale, comme de mouvants corps sonores dans l’espace, conception que je développai graduellement et fis mienne.’ In Edgard Varèse, *Écrits, op. cit.*, 1983, p. 153

<sup>1012</sup> Harry Halbreich and Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Edgard Varèse*, (Collection Entretiens) (Paris: P. Belfond, 1970), pp. 136-138; Marc Wilkinson, ‘Edgard Varèse, Pioneer and Prophet,’ in *Melos*, 28 (April 1961), p. 68-76



process.’<sup>1013</sup> Other approaches include François-Bernard Mâche’s structural analysis, which proceeds according to the analytic principle of distribution of discrete units on the one hand (which, interestingly he terms ‘objects’), and variants and transformations on the other hand. Horodyski criticizes these various approaches: ‘Once again, proving the recurrence of units which return in analogous positions in different contexts annihilates the kinetic play of the figure and the plane in a spatializing formal process.’<sup>1014</sup> Furthermore, American analysts are interested, according to Horodyski, in the play of the sound masses in space: for example, Chou-Wen-chung briefly considers the interaction of the different sound masses; Robert Erickson insists in this regard on the fusion of these masses.<sup>1015</sup> As I have already argued, John Strawn considers the work to consist of 110 three-dimensional entities or *masses* in the score, as well as their interaction. Only Helga de la Motte’s partial analysis carries Horodyski’s favour for mentioning a rotation of 180° in bar 29, and mentions other cases of rotation.

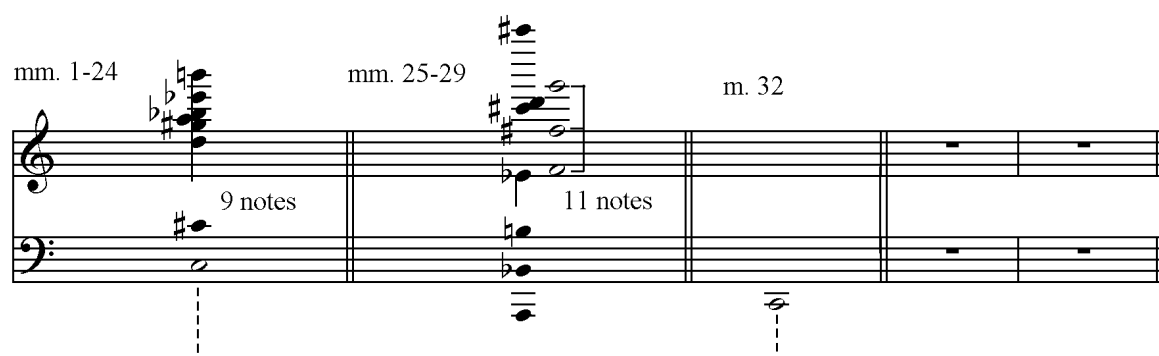


Figure 16: Edgard Varèse, *Intégrales*, chordal rotation

Horodyski then proposes an analysis along the lines of Varèse’s own statements in terms of the spatial projections in *Intégrales*:

<sup>1013</sup> Timothée Horodyski, *op. cit.*, p. 158

<sup>1014</sup> Ibid., ‘Là encore, la mise en évidence de la recurrence d’unités qui reviennent à des positions analogues dans des contextes différents, annihile le jeu cinétique de la figure et du plan, dans un processus formel spatialisant.’

<sup>1015</sup> Robert Erickson, *Sound Structure in Music*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1975). See also the review by Richard Swift, ‘*Sound Structure in Music* by Robert Erickson,’ in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 14, No.1 (Autumn-Winter, 1975), pp. 148-158

*Intégrales* was conceived for spatial projection. I planned it for certain acoustical media that were not then in existence, but that I knew could be built and would be available sooner or later [...] Let us transfer this conception to the optical field and visualize the changing projection of a geometrical figure on a plane, with both figure and plane moving in space, but each with its own arbitrary and varying speeds of translation and rotation.<sup>1016</sup>

Although she criticizes and discusses the work of Jonathan Bernard elsewhere, as we have seen, Horodyski seems to have overlooked the former's *correct* understanding of how Varèse shapes his formal organization. The idea of crystallization – the process of becoming crystal – is explicated in his article on the relation between pitch and register. The idea that cell-like structures are not static but ever-changing is one of Bernard's key points. He quotes Varèse in direct contrast to the use of cell-like structuring devices in the work of George Perle<sup>1017</sup> and others:

There's an idea, the basis of an internal structure, expanded or split into different shapes or groups of sound constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces. The form of the work is the consequence of this interaction.<sup>1018</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> Edgard Varèse, as quoted in Frederic Waldman, 'Edgard Varèse: An Appreciation,' in *Juilliard Review* (Fall, 1954), p. 9

<sup>1017</sup> George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, fourth edition, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977)

<sup>1018</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound,' *op. cit.*, p. 203, quoted by Jonathan Bernard, 'Pitch/Register in the Music of Edgard Varèse,' in *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 3 (Spring, 1981), p. 4

### Intégrales: temporal considerations

An aspect of Edgard Varèse's compositional technique and his aesthetics considers musical time, in light of the spatial aspects and the spatialization discussed above. Like Morton Feldman much later, Varèse was influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson.<sup>1019</sup> In comparison to other modernist music composed in the first half of the twentieth century, Varèse's treatment of musical time can be considered as highly unconventional, even more so than his spatial understanding outlined above. In particular, elements of traditional musical composition, such as melody and counterpoint were entirely replaced or fundamentally changed: for Varèse melody was no longer to be understood horizontally, but had become vertical, in reference to what he himself termed 'the movement of sound-masses, of shifting planes' – intended under ideal circumstances to take the place of 'linear counterpoint.'<sup>1020</sup> As Jonathan Bernard argues in this regard, the temporal dimension had almost 'lost its capacity for predictable regulation.'<sup>1021</sup> The new temporal unfolding in the works of Varèse refused the usual continuity and linearity as mentioned before; one of the most most important types of such a new temporality can be described, according Jonathan Bernard, as 'frozen music,' which he defines as 'pitch collections consisting of short phrases, or one or more chords, or a combination of the two, repeated in varying rhythms, sometimes a great many times before abruptly reverting to something new.'<sup>1022</sup>

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<sup>1019</sup> See Roy Kotynek and John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels. Avant-Garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers and Musicians from the 1850s through the 1960s*, (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2008), p. 81

<sup>1020</sup> Edgard Varèse, c.1923, cited in Louise Varèse, *Varèse: A Looking-Glass Diary*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1972, p. 211, and Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound' ('New Instruments and New Music)

<sup>1021</sup> Jonathan Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 150

<sup>1022</sup> Ibid. See also Jonathan Barnard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), Chapter 4, pp. 134-152. Bernard writes that 'the fact that Goethe once referred to architecture as 'frozen music' (*erstarrte Musik*) was a definite, if unconscious influence on my adoption of this characterization: it is also entirely apposite, since Varèse himself made abundant use of architectural metaphors in describing his compositional approach from the earliest stages of his development – for instance, in his discussion of the 'architectonic' inspiration provided him by Romanesque churches such as the one at Tournus, familiar to him

The opening of *Intégrales* is supposedly characteristic in this respect: one brief melodic figure, minimally varied and elaborated over the first twenty-five measures, alternating with two chords – one in the high woodwinds, the other in the trombones, absolutely fixed with respect to both pitch content and registral disposition – and ‘accompanied’ (though hardly in any traditional sense) by an ever-changing, intricate interplay in the percussion section. As I have argued, all of these components occupy distinctly different spaces, both registrally and timbrally; consequently, it is quite accurate to assert that space here is being developed through time. In that sense, Bernard notion of ‘frozen’ music is hardly tenable. At the same time, the temporal aspect of this music is being developed through space. In other words, the traditional experience of time is challenged by a number of subtle changes to the material, showing precisely a shift away from a pitch-based to a textural approach. As I have shown, this is not a naïve *painting* by instrumental colours, but a finely attuned and dynamically graded music of difference – in other words, bringing the experience of musical time to the fore *via* the projection of musical space. However, as Horodyski and de la Motte have shown, Varèse is a composer who was firmly rooted in his time and who drew conclusions from his knowledge of earlier music, and other arts.

This reciprocity stems not only from the generally strong visual attributes of Varèse’s musical thought, but even more crucially from the affinities it bears to the visual art of early modernism, particularly (in this case) cubist painting and sculpture. In cubism, multiple views of the *same* object, represented in sequence or in superimposition, were often featured.<sup>1023</sup> In such work, artists sought to incorporate a kind of temporality, which up to that point in history would not have been generally considered available to an art that – unlike, say, music or dance – does not

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from his boyhood. See Gunther Schuller, ‘Conversation with Varèse,’ *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring-Summer 1965), p. 32-37

<sup>1023</sup> See Jonathan Bernard, *The music of Edgard Varèse*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1, p. 6-23

literally develop through time.<sup>1024</sup> My reading of the work attempted to specifically show the dialectic of the spatialization of time, and the temporal in the spatial, as it is presented in this work. Varèse precisely knows how to *proceed* in the sense that the musical fabric of his work creates an ever-changing kaleidoscopic vision of instrumental colour. This foreshadows the work of the two composers considered in the next two chapters, who in their reception of Varèse's work, went even further in the development of a musical alternative to the grand narrative of increasing rationalization of the musical material. In one sense, Varèse's music can be considered in this light of the future *musique informelle*, however, presenting an image of technological reason by critically *arresting* time in subtle ways to form *temporal* images.

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<sup>1024</sup> Bernard, *ibid.*, p. 8. 'It was a stroke of Varèse's peculiar genius to have conceived of a way to complete the circuit, as it were, bringing ideas of time that arose in response to the inherent limitations of an ostensibly atemporal medium back into music. In doing so, he effectively mounted a challenge to some of the more ingrained habits of temporal structure in Western music, in the process revising rhythm and duration on all levels, from their surface manifestations to their large-scale effects.'



**CHAPTER 6: Morton Feldman, the Instrumental Image, and *Words and Music***





## Introduction

This chapter evolves the issues raised in the previous chapters, and attempts to demonstrate how the notion of the image in its different philosophical and compositional meanings can be seen to have inspired the American composer Morton Feldman. I draw on the work of Sebastian Claren, who wrote a seminal book on the composer.<sup>1025</sup> The chapter consists of two parts, the first of which explores Feldman's notion of the instrumental image. A second part focuses on the allegorical work *Words and Music*, a radio play by Samuel Beckett for which Feldman composed a score, which can be fruitfully read in light of the reading strategy I propose. Feldman's affinity in this sense for the allegorical in this work by Beckett resonates strongly with the idea of the allegorical image in Benjamin's work. Furthermore, it adds a crucial practical perspective to theoretical elements I propose in terms of an aesthetics of the musical *informel*. A number of the issues in the work of Varèse, including the importance of musical space, return in the work of Feldman.

In this regard, an important contribution to the twentieth-century history of ideas, specifically in relation to musical temporality and spatialization are represented in Feldman's writings. In these various articles, interviews and essays, Feldman often refers to his views on musical time and space. He confronts the centrality of 'construction' (or *technique*) of traditional compositional practices, as reducing musical time to something that can be 'handled', or 'counted out in seconds' (in his phrase, 'music-in-time'), whilst proposing a new understanding of 'music-as-time.' In this sense, music's linear, chronological progression through time, where the music was identified with its chronological position within a work, came undone. This approach appeared for the first time in his *In Search of an Orchestration* —one of the crucial scores to be considered in

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<sup>1025</sup> Claren, Sebastian, *Neither. Die Musik Morton Feldmans*, (Hofheim, Wolke, 2000). Although it was published in 2000, it remains untranslated.

this study. By refusing to subsume his music to ‘the horizontal continuity’ of the traditional conception of musical temporality, the vertical aspect of music – through the ‘juxtaposition of registers’ – could then be developed. Rather than constructing sequences of pitches, rhythms and harmonies, Feldman’s music, like the work of Varèse and Xenakis, attempts to develop a compositional approach governing a sequence of *textures*; thereby, the functionality of earlier formal approaches, where one element of a sequence has a functional relationship to the previous, is abandoned.

Especially in his late work, Feldman’s music aims to undermine what he calls the ‘illusory’ character of music by playing on the capacity of human memory, finally revealing it to be incapable of *remembering* correctly, further undermining the linear chronology of traditional musico-temporal expectations. In this regard, the comments Morton Feldman made on the music of Edgard Varèse are of some note, as they show how important the temporal aspect of Varèse’s music was for his work, as well as the huge influence some of the ideas had in general. Between mid-1966 and early 1967, John Cage and Morton Feldman conversed about a number of different topics, relating to philosophy, literature and music in what they titled ‘Radio Happenings.’ Although John Cage is generally heard asking questions, in one of these dialogues Feldman explains the import of Varèse on his conception of time in the following terms, which I would like to quote here at length:

MF: Again I must go back to Varèse. I think that there is that, you know, that marvellous, stationary almost, grandeur of Varèse. I think it has to do with the fact that, we began to hear closer in time and especially we began to hear without the necessity of relationships.

JC: [...] I guess I’ll use your term, I think of a vertical structure. This is what you’re talking about – it is a vertical structure. It then takes on the aspect of the rejection of time, doesn’t it?

MF: Yes, well, you know, one of the difficulties that Varèse does present us is, say, the reality of the material that we hear, these messages.[...] In other words, that, I feel, is the reality, or the material.[...] The material is something else. There is this dichotomy between the material and yet this other reality that we hear.[...] I hear that direct impact of the sound not becoming a symbol. [...] and this element of continuity, to me, is not just counting time.[...] I can actually say that he changed my mind in the real sense of the word.<sup>1026</sup>

From the simple pattern to the overall form, Feldman positions his music ‘between categories’, denying precisely the conceptualization and objectification of the sonorous material that Adorno noted in the totally objectified music of the post-war avant-garde. In fact, this music – which lies outside what is often considered to be the traditional scope of Adorno’s work – forces us not simply to reconsider Adorno’s late writings – including *Aesthetic Theory* and essays such as *Vers une musique informelle* – but they reveal their current critical potential when read ‘against the grain’, especially in the light of Walter Benjamin’s understanding of temporality and his notion of the dialectical image.

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<sup>1026</sup> Morton Feldman and John Cage, ‘Radio Happenings,’ (Cologne, MusikTexte, 1993), p 111

### **Analytic remarks and critique of *On Time and the Instrumental Factor***

In *On Time and the Instrumental Factor* (1971) the succession of systems presents a crucial basis for the complete composition, which creates a mostly homogeneous sound, interrupted by several long rests. The compositional method of structuring his works according to the length of a system occurs for the first time in *Durations 4* (1961), in which one unit consists of 17 beats, or one system, which also conforms to the space on a single page. It is of note that this conforms to Feldman's graphic method, in which compositional structure can be identified with their graphical ordering. This transfer of his graphic method towards his conventionally notated work also includes the use of what he calls his 'free durational notation' and accepts momentarily the regularity of the system as a given structuring of the music.

Feldman treats the individual systems, here each lasting seven bars, as fixed instrumental images, which he repeats in total or splits up in several parts and combines them into new images. The first image (p. 1) can be described as a series of tones spread out over the various instruments, interspersed by rests, creating an overall homogeneous sound, with small colour changes. Often, chromatic neighbouring tones are juxtaposed in different instruments, which has a diffusive effect, as in an unfocused photograph.

ON TIME AND THE INSTRUMENTAL FACTOR

1

morton feldman

♩ = 56-66

Piccolo

Flutes 1 & 2

Alto Flute

Oboe 1

English Horn

Clarinets in Bb 1 & 2

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Bassoons

Double Bassoon

♩ = 56-66

Horns 1 & 2 in F

Trumpets in Bb 1 & 2

Bass Trumpet in Bb

Trombones 1 & 2

Bass Trombone

Tuba

♩ = 56-66

Chimes

Celesta

Harp

♩ = 56-66

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

V'celli

Double Basses

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Figure 17: Morton Feldman, *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, (1971), p. 1

The next three images are more ‘focused’ – their orchestration and tonal content are more clear, less chromatically dense. The texture seems to be one of more open sounds. Page 4 will return, almost unchanged, as page 6. The fifth image once again takes up the denser texture, as a juxtaposition of the second and third images, before the open textures return.



2

Picc.

Fl. 1

A. Fl.

Ob.

E.H.

Cl. 1

B. Cl.

Bn. 1

D. Bn.

Hr. 1

Trp. 1

B. Trp.

Tbn. 1

B. Tbn.

Tbn. 2

Ch.

Cel.

Hp.

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

C.B.

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Figure 18: *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, p. 2



3

15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Picc.  
Fl. 1  
2  
A.Fl.  
Ob. 1  
2  
E.H.  
Cl. 1  
2  
B.Cl.  
Bn. 1  
2  
D.Bn.  
Hn. 1  
2  
Trp. 1  
2  
B.Trp.  
Tbn. 1  
2  
B.Tbn.  
Tba.  
Ch.  
Cel.  
Hp.  
Vn. 1  
2  
Vla.  
Vlc.  
C.B.

div.  
univ.  
pizz.  
(arco)  
div. ag.  
univ.  
univ.  
univ.  
univ.  
univ.

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Figure 19: *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, p. 3



Handwritten musical score for "On Time and the Instrumental Factor, p. 5". The score is written on 24 staves, organized into four systems of six staves each. The instruments are listed on the left: Picc., Fl. 1, A.Fl., Ob. 1, EH., Cl. 1, B.Cl., Br. 1, D.Br., Hn. 1, Trp. 1, B.Trp., Tbn. 1, B.Tbn., Tba., Ch., Cel., Hp., Vn. 1, Vn. 2, Vla., Vlc., and Cb. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Red circles and lines are drawn around specific musical phrases, likely indicating areas of interest or correction. The page number "5" is written in the top right corner. The text "LE 15351 NY" is printed at the bottom center.

Figure 20: *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, p. 5

On page 8, longer durations appear, creating a general stasis, although interrupted in bar 54. From page 9 onwards we see a growing disintegration of the images into specks of colour, with more and more frequent rests. A variant of the last two bars of page 5 form the respective bars of page 11. In addition, bars 1-6 of page 12 are formed by a combination of variants of bars 5-7 of page 1 and bars 2-4 of page 8, and the first two bars of page 9 refer to the last two of page 13, presenting a denser orchestral texture. On the last page, a clear ending is lacking.



Picc.  
 Fl. 1  
 2  
 A. Fl.  
 Ob. 1  
 2  
 E.H.  
 Cl. 1  
 2  
 B.Cl.  
 Bn. 1  
 (1)  
 D.Bn.  
 Hn. 1  
 2  
 Trp. 1  
 2  
 B.Trp.  
 Tbn. 1  
 2  
 B.Tbn.  
 Tba.  
 Ch.  
 Cel.  
 Hp.  
 Vn. 1  
 Vn. 2  
 Vla.  
 Vlc.  
 C.B.  
 LE 15351 NY  
 Aug. 1, 1969

Figure 21: *On Time and the Instrumental Factor*, p. 15

Firstly, Feldman's approach to musical time and duration is one which *spatializes* time rather prosaically. This means that time is stretched, and the individual *moments* or images are seen not only in time but are treated as snippets of a musical canvas, to be ripped up and recomposed. This is a marked difference from the developmental method of traditional compositional technique. In this case it is more exact to speak of variants, as no development is taking place. Secondly, it is important to note how the individual images are structured following the physical space of a page of music paper. Significant as it may be in terms of compositional procedure, it also illuminates a further point: the always broken transfer of a graphic, visual idea in sound.<sup>1027</sup> In other words, the resulting sound is not a simple mirror image [*Abbild*] as in a dream. The boundary of a single page is not an aural one in the same way. The sound will always present an illusion, whereas the seeming subjugation of the composer to something as urbane as a sheet of music paper reveals the technical qualities of what is created. These open traces of the creative process – Feldman was known to hang up his music or graph paper on the wall, and work on them as a painter on a canvas, or set of canvases – are the wounds of Feldman's process of submitting an idea to the technical demands of the compositional process. This more fundamental, interrupted transfer is therefore still recognizable, albeit less so in aural terms. This

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<sup>1027</sup> This idea of transfer and the mediation of music and painting, as well as the use of 'moments' was also taken up by other composers, including Hugues Dufourt. See for example his *Le Philosophe selon Rembrandt* (1991), of which he writes; 'Invoquant Rembrandt, j'ai tenté de me réapproprier par 'art du timbre' la prodigieuse palette du peintre en construisant un espace sonore inspiré par l'analogie de son espèce plastique. Le temps, la forme, les enchaînements harmoniques, la repartition de registres et des tessitures, l'ensemble même de l'orchestration se composent selon la loi du clair-obscur pour produire *une médiation incessante de moments différenciés*.' In Pierre Albert Castanet, *Hugues Dufourt, 25 ans de musique contemporaine*, (Paris, Michel de Maule, 1995), p. 147; cited in Célestin Deliège, *Cinquante ans de modernité musicale: de Darmstadt à l'IRCAM. Contribution historiographique à une musicologie critique*, (Sprimont, Mardaga, 2003), p. 914. As Deliège points out in this regard, these moments 'constitute in effect de fundamental substance of the work; they succeed one another during the duration of the whole piece according to a formula of variations against a backdrop of invariants which denote an exceptional obsession of the same projected onto [that which is] different, defying any maximalism as much as any minimalism.'

dialectic situates the now of recognizability between the score and its performance. However, these two poles also constitute a critique of more traditional approaches to composition, where the illusion of continuity is continued on the page, with the score as an almost insubstantial tool, not to be confused with the actual music. Conductors who pride themselves in *knowing* the music conduct without a score, idem for tests of memory for pianists and other musicians at some conservatoires.

### Feldman and the New York School

This different compositional approach reflects Feldman's affinity with painters such as Willem De Kooning, a Dutchman working in New York at the time. In an interview conducted by Sebastian Claren with Brian O'Doherty, who knew Feldman in the 1960s, O'Doherty claims Feldman often spoke of creating 'seamless collages,' in which the individual parts of a composition could be swapped, without the 'cuts' being audible.<sup>1028</sup> De Kooning presented the different stadia of the development process of a painting next to one another, or pasted together fragments from one or more sketches; in one case, he even cut up a large painting into squares and put them back together. Relating this approach to his own work, in one of the *Radio Happenings* mentioned above with John Cage,<sup>1029</sup> Feldman explains how his approach to time changed:

Morton Feldman: It's a piece for orchestra called "In Search of an Orchestration," where it is very loosely controlled, in terms of register, in terms of the way the timbre lines up vertically, and [it] allows for great divergence (laughs) [...]

John Cage: How does the notation go?

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<sup>1028</sup> Sebastian Claren, interview with Brian O'Doherty, New York City, 11 October 1993, in Sebastian Claren, *Neither, op. cit.*, p. 141

<sup>1029</sup> John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff, *Radio Happenings I-V: Recorded at W'bai, New York City, July 1966-January 1967*, (Cologne, MusikTexte, 1993), p. 144

MF: It's graphic [...] It's got numbers

JC: But not high, middle and low?

MF: Not high, middle and low.

JC: Just the numbers?

MF: Just the numbers. Occasionally I would have an arrow point high, or low. [...] And it's for a very big orchestra.

JC: What about the dynamics?

MF: Well, the dynamics are still soft.

JC: Not that loud at all, ever?

MF: Not loud at all.<sup>1030</sup>

The conversation turns to the reason why Feldman did no longer find it expedient to use any louder dynamics:

JC: You remember, years ago, there were sporadic loud sounds. What made them disappear?

MF: I think they existed as some form of punctuation.

JC: Did you feel they were no longer necessary?

MF: I was still involved, I don't remember, but I think I was still involved with some element of differentiation.

JC: They'd be, though, wouldn't they, the opposite of punctuation, since by being louder they would stand out?

MF: Exclamation points (laugh). I don't know what happened, John. Maybe I heard too much of its attack, maybe I have some notion about the purity of the sound itself being lost in the loudness of the attack.

JC: At any rate, did it appear to you as unnecessary to the rest of the music?

MF: Yes. It also, in a sense, created a certain amount of energy that I felt I had to use. They became an interference of some kind. Do you remember my earlier 'graph pieces' where, say, the woodwinds,

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<sup>1030</sup> Ibid.

would be given a long period of time in which to make their entrance, but they would make it to some degree chronologically in time? In this new piece, they begin any place within the structure, not in the beginning, in other words he doesn't begin on the beat or off the beat, he'd begin at the very end of the structure, which was quite different for me, because I was still filling out some type of chronological information.<sup>1031</sup>

Feldman refers to *chronological information* as a type of notation consisting of a linear passage of time. As Sebastian Claren noted, 'whilst the free entries of the *Intersections* [the series of the early 'graph pieces' Feldman refers to in the above quotation] must always happen within a single beat and therefore their sequence is generally fixed, the instruments in *In Search of an Orchestration* have up to seven beats time to execute a single (grace) note.'<sup>1032</sup>

The texture of this work is in this case controlled at a global level, whilst some of the individual aspects of the timbre, like register, are left free to decide, some other aspects are precisely notated, for example the way of playing and the movement of the pitches. The resulting sound of the notational fields is altogether actually precisely balanced. Both *In Search* and *The Straits of Magellan*, have the tempo marking 88 mm throughout and *very soft* to *extremely soft* as dynamic markings. Claren writes that, 'in any case, as Feldman clearly became aware of the conventional conception of the passage of time, which was still implied in his early works *Projections* and *Intersections*; he attempted to break this mold of linear succession of events at all costs'<sup>1033</sup>

He argues that those early works were still conceived as a horizontal series of events, in which 'time was treated literally conventionally.'<sup>1034</sup> In his estimation, as long as you 'work with a horizontal continuity, you are still dependent, roughly put, on differentiation – in my case the

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<sup>1031</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1032</sup> Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*, p. 85

<sup>1033</sup> Ibid., p. 85

<sup>1034</sup> Ibid.

juxtaposition of registers.<sup>1035</sup> However, if on the other hand ‘you attempt to imagine the sound in total space, you always end up with a continually sub-divided space.’<sup>1036</sup> Crucially, he argues that ‘things not essential to the sound itself, place themselves incessantly in the way. The sound has become more elastic, but is not yet *plastic*. The next step would be to research the sound in depth, i.e. vertically.’<sup>1037</sup> The influence of Varèse as well as Bergson are palpable here, if on the one hand the idea of the haptic dimension (as Helga de la Motte argues) and on the other hand the Bergsonian idea of the continuity between regimes of time, the duration of the individual and the duration of the universe. These are here sought at the level of the composition; in other words, the continuity is to be found in the vertical space, no longer simply in the horizontal dimension of music. This allows for a reconceptualization of the usual opposition of continuous/discontinuous notions of temporal unfolding. Time is not simply *spatialized*, it is discontinuous in the way it is constructed – and therefore no longer a given, or taken for granted – and at the same time, contained in the idea of the experience of duration, which Adorno stresses is a lesson from Bergson one cannot forget.<sup>1038</sup> He wrote that

the objective time-factor in all parameters and the living experiential time of the phenomenon are by no means identical. Duration and pitch belong to different musical realms, even if in acoustics they come under the same heading. In the controversy on this point the concept of time is used equivocally. It covers both *temps espace* and *temps durée*, physically measurable, quasi-spatial time and experiential time. Bergson’s insight into their incompatibility cannot be erased.<sup>1039</sup>

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<sup>1035</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1037</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1038</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle,’ in *Quasi una Fantasia*, *op. cit.*, p. 312

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid.



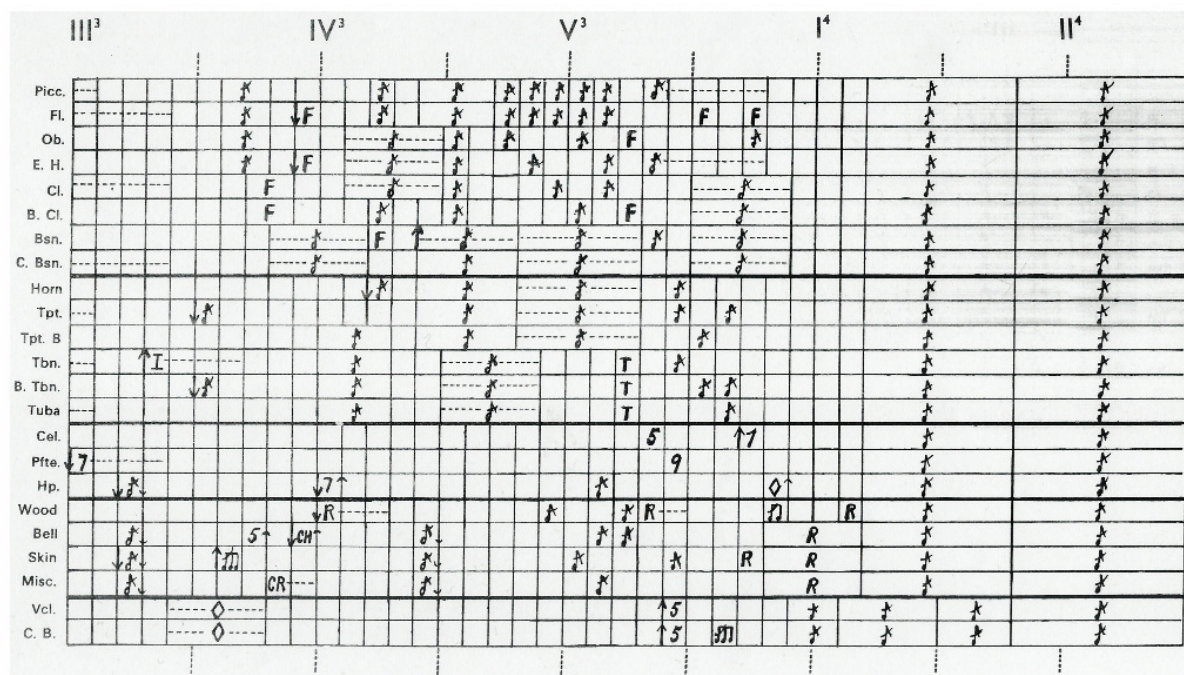


Figure 22: Morton Feldman, *In Search of an Orchestration*, p. 5

To Feldman, the weakness of these early graph pieces consisted not only in the reproduction of historical clichés by the performers, but in holding on to conventional musical thought, (something John Cage also noted, especially with the use of indeterminate notation in his *Piano Concerto*, amongst others),<sup>1040</sup> establishing the musical progression/succession [*Verlauf*] on the basis of a series of sound elements [*Klangereignisse*] and thereby closely related to conventional musical gestures:

<sup>1040</sup> For a discussion of this performance issue, as well as the use of indeterminate notational problems, including the relation between the category of the work of art and the crisis of identity through these procedures, see James Pritchett, *The Development of Chance Techniques in the Music of John Cage, 1950-1956*, (PhD Thesis, New York, New York University, 1988); *The Music of John Cage*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993). For specific issues concerning the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958), see Johanne Rivest, Johanne, *Le Concert for Piano and Orchestra de John Cage ou les limites de l'indétermination*, (Montreal, Université de Montreal, Canada, 1996), pp. 112-124. Pritchett states that 'the ambiguous projection of points, lines and curves into musical space is the primary means by which indeterminacy is arrived at in the notation of the *Solo for Piano*, but it is certainly not the only one.'

After several years of writing graph music, I began to discover its most important flaw. I was not only allowing the sounds to be free – I was also liberating the performer. I had never thought of the graph as an art of improvisation but more as a totally abstract sonic adventure. This realization was important because I now understood that if the performers sounded bad it was less because of their lapses of taste than because I was still involved with passages and continuity that allowed their presence to be felt.<sup>1041</sup>

As long as musical time is treated as a chronological succession, in which sound must be articulated through horizontal differentiation, the performers and listeners alike establish causal links between the successive sounds, even when the succession of the individual events is established through chance operations, which is not the case with Feldman. This lets sound itself fade into the background; this remark prompted Christian Wolff to remark, after a performance of Cage's *Music for Piano*, that "eventually everything becomes melody"<sup>1042</sup>

In reference to Christian Wolff, Feldman further explains in *Vertical Thoughts* that he 'once remarked that eventually everything becomes melody. This is true. Time does untangle complexity. We are eventually left with the one-dimensional – with the face of the clock rather than the workings of its inner parts. Time in relation to sound is not unlike a sundial whose enigmatic hand travels imperceptibly throughout its journey.'<sup>1043</sup>

Finally, Benjamin's category of the dialectical image as an image that appears in a flashlike instance, is here pushed to an extreme. Feldman's attempt to create these (instrumental) images

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<sup>1041</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Autobiography: Morton Feldman,' in Walter Zimmermann (ed.), *op. cit.*, (1985), p. 38

<sup>1042</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Vertikale Gedanken (Vertical Thoughts),' in Walter Zimmermann (ed.), *Essays*, p. 46 [German translation], originally in Morton Feldman, 'Vertical Thoughts,' in *Kulchur*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (Autumn), p.

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<sup>1043</sup> Ibid.

recognizes the technical aspect of the limitation of its capturing device (the single page) in an allegorical way: musical images or moments could perfectly last longer than a page, but Feldman chooses to fix an ‘instrumental image’ on the page, much like Benjamin’s attempts to capture images of the nineteenth century to dialectically ‘settle’, before they can be read.<sup>1044</sup> The instrumental images appear as an abstract, complex texture, with a lifespan of a page, to reappear later in combination with another image. Its interior space is not static, but fluid, and creates a sense of inner tension.

Feldman’s work *On time and the instrumental Factor* shows affinities with the methods used in the visual arts (the idea of montage and collage), but also markedly differs from them, in its insistence on the temporal dimension, without falling in the trap of developmental ideologies – which Feldman openly critiqued both in his writings and in his music – or organic coherence. In this sense, the visual approach to composition presents an extra way of destroying this coherence, both on a surface level and in its form. It is as if too many resolutions and affirmative cadences have imploded and condensed into static moments, rather than progressions of individual chords. In this sense, sound has come to a standstill. To paraphrase Beckett’s *Unnameable* (1953), however, ‘it can’t go on, it will go on.’<sup>1045</sup> However, this is not to say that this composition presents a new approach which solves yet another compositional problem. As Benjamin said: ‘The concept of progress has to be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things continue to ‘go on’ *is* the catastrophe. It is not something that is impending in the future, but something that

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<sup>1044</sup> In a sense, this musical textures in this work are repeated and layered through the technique of montage, or even collage. For a discussion of the broader aspect and relation between space and history in this sense, see Brigid Doherty, “The “Colportage Phenomenon of Space” and the Place of Montage in *The Arcades Project*, in *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, Vol. 81, No. 1, pp. 37-64

<sup>1045</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable*,

is always given.<sup>1046</sup> Or, as Hanselm Haverkamp remarks: ‘There is no redemption except for the ‘image’ quoted, a ‘fossil’ whose archaic index indicates not the survival of the fittest, but ‘catastrophe’ as the possibility of criticism in reading.’<sup>1047</sup> In terms of *reading* Feldman’s music in this regard, the musicologist Dalibor Davidovic<sup>1048</sup> distinguishes between two types: the reading of Feldman as ‘modernist,’ and a reading in terms of his ‘Americanness’<sup>1049</sup> – the latter represented by John Zorn, who insists upon the Jewish element in Feldman’s thinking. Davidovic places Feldman’s music outside history<sup>1050</sup> and finds the foundation of an abstract rule: the longer the works, the less material is used. None of these approaches seem to really appreciate the contradiction in terms of an a-historical, and a historically and socially mediated music *at the same time*.

In conclusion, it can be said that Morton Feldman’s work, *On time and the instrumental Factor*, presents us with a set of instrumental images, which are both transitory and static, presented as moments in time; this process operates in a way which is similar way to the commodity’s position between the petrified nature of the fossil and the transitory nature of the ruin in Benjamin’s *Passagenwerke*. This local history, as presented in this composition can be seen as a sonic montage of a number of sound-objects. The present and the presence of the image shows this dialectics of a material at a standstill. Benjamin’s fragmentary theory of the dialectic image

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<sup>1046</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades*, *op. cit.*, Convolute ‘N’ 9a.11

<sup>1047</sup> Anselm Haverkamp, ‘Notes on the “Dialectical Image” How Deconstructive is it?’, *op. cit.*, p. 76

<sup>1048</sup> Dalibor Davidović, ‘Das Aufgeschobene Ende. Versuch Über Die Musik Morton Feldmans,’ in *Musik & Ästhetik*, Vol. 10, No. 38 (2006), pp. 58-66

<sup>1049</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

<sup>1050</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60: ‘Die Musik läuft ohne einen vorbestimmten Weg, und daher der Eindruck, daß sich eigentlich nichts bewegt oder daß es sich zumindest um ein nomadisches, zielloses Wandern handelt. In einer bestimmten Hinsicht läßt sich bei Feldman aber doch von einem vorbe- stimmten Weg sprechen: Sein Werk kreist wie besessen um ein Zentrum, das sich nicht erreichen läßt. Es ist fixiert auf dieses abwesende Zentrum, auf das nicht präsentierbare Stück, das unendlich ist und **sich außerhalb des Historischen befindet.**’

calls for a renewed way of reading, one which is sympathetic to the demarche of a composer such as Feldman.

### **Feldman's concept of the instrumental image and Bergson's philosophy of time**

Morton Feldman's aesthetics can be described as a complex combination of compositional intuitions and techniques, based on a conceptual basis of knowledge of the other arts and philosophy more generally. On the one hand, his interest in the visual and plastic arts, in particular the work of the Abstract Expressionists as well as antique Anatolian carpets (with their abstract patterns), led him to rethink the *chronological* flow of time in traditional music. He achieved this not through a reduction of the temporal aspect of music to a simple spatial plane, but by recognizing – via Bergson's dualistic theory of *temps espace* (clock time or literally 'spatialized time') and *temps durée* (or lived, experienced time) – how the manipulation of the regular sequence of motivic-thematic composition could be renewed by uncoupling the motifs (or patterns) from this chronological line-up. In other words, music's temporal 'essence' is freed from what he saw as this 'forced' unfolding, by recognizing its spatial aspect: a score is then only *one* representation of this. On the other hand, a critique of the *conceptual* aspect of traditional music theory and composition lies at the foundation of Feldman's approach. In this chapter, Feldman's compositional approach is seen in light of these theories; in particular the concept of the *instrumental* image, which brings together the temporality of music together with its spatial aspect as sound-in-space.

***Between Categories: a critique of traditional compositional categories and concepts***

Feldman's aesthetics can not only be understood by analyzing his compositions, but also by a reading of his essays, interviews and other writings. Conceptually, Feldman outlined his position in *Between Categories*,<sup>1051</sup> amongst other texts. This text is arguably influenced by his contact with the members of a Club on Eighth Street, whose members included Philip Pavia, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Philip Guston and included conversations with composers including Edgard Varèse, and John Cage, with evening performances of the Feldman's music.<sup>1052</sup> In it, he discusses a number of topics, including the relationship between painting and music, especially from the composer's point of view:

Oscar Wilde tells us that a painting can be interpreted in two ways – by its subject or by its surface. He goes on to warn us, however, that if we pursue the painting's meaning in its subject, we do so at our peril. Conversely, if we seek the meaning of the painting in its surface – we do this also at our peril. I will not be as ominous as Oscar Wilde, though this problem does exist when we separate one integral part from another.<sup>1053</sup>

Feldman continues by pointing out that music too has a subject and a surface. The subject of music to him 'from [Guillaume de] Machaut to [Pierre] Boulez, has always been its construction.'<sup>1054</sup> He explains that melodies or 12-tone rows 'just don't happen,'<sup>1055</sup> but 'must be constructed.' The same goes for rhythms or to 'demonstrate any formal idea in music, whether structure or stricture, is a matter of construction, in which the methodology is the controlling

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<sup>1051</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Between Categories,' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street, Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, B.H. Friedman (ed.), (Cambridge, MA, Exact Change, 1969), pp. 83-89

<sup>1052</sup> Natalie Edgar, *Club without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia*, (New York: Midmarch Arts, 2007)

<sup>1053</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Between Categories,' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street, Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, B.H. Friedman (ed.), (Cambridge, MA, Exact Change, 1969), p. 83

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid.

metaphor of the composition.<sup>1056</sup> However, describing the *surface* of a musical composition is much more problematic. To do so, Feldman refers to two painters: Piero della Francesca<sup>1057</sup> and Paul Cézanne, the construction and surface of their paintings lead him to conceptualize the ‘aural plane’ in music.<sup>1058</sup> Feldman argues that *technique*, in the form of perspective, changed painting not only in a visible way, but conceptually:

Piero della Francesca is compounded with mysteries. Like Bach, his construction is his genius. We are looking into a world whose spatial relationships have adopted the newly discovered principles of Perspective.<sup>1059</sup>

Perspective for Feldman is an instrument of *measurement*, but one Piero Della Francesca hid in plain sight, achieving a sense of timelessness, what he terms as *eternity*. Della Francesca’s painting, he argues, ‘seems to recede into eternity – into some kind of Jungian collective memory of the beginning of the Christian ethos.’<sup>1060</sup> This idea of a timeless essence as illusory, is the main idea of the next section of Feldman’s argument. Piero created an illusory surface, beneath which lies a space we *engage* with as viewers, as ‘the surface seems to be just a door we enter to experience the painting as a whole.’<sup>1061</sup> For Feldman, the construction of this illusion is so strong – drawing on the technique of perspective achieves depth in a flat surface – that the surface of the picture itself seems to disappear. Crucially, this technique ‘separates the painter’s objects in order to

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<sup>1056</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1057</sup> See the discussion between Philip Pavia, Willem de Kooning and John Graham’s; the latter mentions Piero della Francesca in a discussion about Picasso’s cubist painting:

**Philip Pavia:** ‘You must admit that Uccello’s perspective points helped make the Guernica a great mural.’

**Willem de Kooning:** ‘The Guernica does spin around one or two perspective points...’

**John Graham:** ‘You have it all wrong. It’s not the perspective points that make the Guernica a revolutionary painting. It’s the flat areas with their sensitive edges. And he stole those from Piero della Francesca.’ See Natalie Edgar, *Club without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia*, (New York: Midmarch Arts, 2007), p. 32

<sup>1058</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Between Categories,’ *op. cit.*, p. 83

<sup>1059</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1060</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1061</sup> Ibid.



accomplish the synthesis that brings them into relationship with each other.<sup>1062</sup> Feldman argues, in an almost Adornoian way, that in this sort of artwork, synthesis presents a false reconciliation of the parts *as* the whole – ‘because this synthesis is illusionistic, we are able to contain both this separation and unity as a simultaneous image.’<sup>1063</sup> The resulting image, for Feldman is a form of hallucination, generalizable to such an extent that he claims that ‘all attempts at utilizing an organizational principle, either in painting or music, have an aspect of hallucination.’<sup>1064</sup> To counter this hallucinatory form of art, he presents the contrasting approach of Paul Cézanne, whose influence on the Abstract Expressionists he highlights:

Cézanne, on the other hand, does not recede into an arcane time world. The construction of the painting, which might begin as a pictorial idea, disappears, leaving little trace of a unifying organizational principle. Rather than taking us into a world of memory, we are pushed into something more immediate in its insistence on the picture plane. The search for the surface has become the obsessive theme of the painting.<sup>1065</sup>

Feldman raises here a number of important points:

1. The idea that a form of *archaic time* is at work in perspectival painting, one based on
2. The creation of illusory, *three-dimensional* space ignoring
3. The material *reality* of the image’s *two-dimensional* surface<sup>1066</sup>
4. The fact that although an organizational plan may have existed, it is rather dependent on the actual elements, which are parts of the plane itself.

Feldman had already written on the transformative influence of these painters. In 1961 he argued that the new abstract expressionist painting made him ‘desirous of a sound world more direct,

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<sup>1062</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1063</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1064</sup> Morton Feldman, *op. cit.*, p. 83

<sup>1065</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1066</sup> Not that this should needs an explanatory note, but *two-dimensional* means *in the same plane*, or in other words, *flat*.

more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore.’<sup>1067</sup> As argued before, it was elements of Varèse’s compositional technique which influenced him. In addition, Anton von Webern also brought some of these elements to the fore. Feldman argues that this ‘new structure required a concentration more demanding than if the technique were that of still photography, which for me is what precise notation has come to imply.’<sup>1068</sup> For Feldman, this required as much a change in notation as a new compositional approach.

To return to the essay *Between Categories*, he specifies:

The Abstract Expressionist painters carried Cézanne’s surging surface another step forward into what Philip Pavia characterised as “*raw space*”.<sup>1069</sup> Rothko discovered further that the surface did not have to be activated by the rhythmic vitality of a Pollock to be kept alive... that it could exist as a strange, vast, monolithic sundial, as it were, with the exterior world reflecting upon it still another meaning – another breathing.<sup>1070</sup>

This almost mystical description, including the idea of *raw space*, seems to refer to the circle, or ‘club’ on New York’s Eighth Street originally started in 1948,<sup>1071</sup> where members mentioned above would meet to discuss new ideas in the arts. With regard to the idea of *raw space*, for example, Philip Pavia explained the influence of the theosophists, especially Anne Besant, who ‘described the birth of the world as an egg-shape, and human beings—in fact all living creatures—were born in an egg form. The *raw space* surrounding us reaches out and communicates with the outer cosmos. Space is called communication essence.’<sup>1072</sup> However, Feldman does not seem to lose himself in further mystification in *Between Categories*, but returns

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<sup>1067</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Autobiography,’ in Walter Zimmermann (ed.), *Morton Feldman Essays, op. cit.*, p. 38

<sup>1068</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1069</sup> See Natalie Edgar, *Club without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia*, (New York: Midmarch Arts, 2007), p. 41

<sup>1070</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Between Categories,’ *op.cit.*

<sup>1071</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>1072</sup> Ibid., p. 48

to the central tenets of his theory about the centrality of construction in both music and painting, a parallel he observes between the two artforms until the early years of the twentieth century. He avers that ‘music also introduced *illusionistic* elements during the early Renaissance by way of inaugurating passages of both soft and loud sounds,’<sup>1073</sup> which he found to be of particular interest in the ‘miraculous blending or fusing of the registers into a homogeneous entity, as in the choral music of Josquin.’<sup>1074</sup> He subsequently notes the importance of philosophy in music, or better the ‘spectre of Hegel’s dialectic,’ in the nineteenth century, leading to what he terms the ‘last significant organizational idea in both painting and music:’<sup>1075</sup> Picasso’s ‘analytical cubism, and a decade later, Schoenberg’s principle of composing with the 12 tones.’<sup>1076</sup> Interestingly he adds that ‘Webern is even more related to Cubism in its formal fragmentation.’<sup>1077</sup>

In the following passage, Feldman attempts to shift to a different idea: how form in painting and music is historical, and how some of the artists, like Picasso, extend the history of their artform through a critical analysis of the way in which form has arrived at a certain point:

But just as Picasso in Cubism was summing up – an analysis of the history of formal ideas in painting that extended his own future – this tendency also characterised the great names at that time. Schoenberg, Webern, Stravinsky – are more the history of music than an extension of musical history.<sup>1078</sup>

In that last turn of phrase, it appears that Feldman counts these respective composers as historical, in that their compositional approach had come at the end of a long historical era. This critique lead him to what I consider to be the idea of central importance of the entire essay: the way in which artists conceive of *objects* and their temporal aspect. Feldman continues by

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<sup>1073</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1074</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1075</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1076</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1077</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1078</sup> Ibid.

criticizing Picasso, ‘who found Cubism in Cézanne, developed from this system,’ but ‘failed to see Cézanne’s more far reaching contribution.’<sup>1079</sup> This contribution does *not* consist in *how* to make an object – i.e. ‘how [t]his object exists by way of Time, *in* Time or about Time’ – but ‘how this object exists *as* Time.’<sup>1080</sup> Importantly, Feldman then refers to both Proust’s oeuvre as ‘time regained,’<sup>1081</sup> and Aristotle’s ‘time as an image.’<sup>1082</sup>

Feldman refers to two distinct theories, both of which refer implicitly to the idea that time, or better our perception of time, is linked with memory: Proust’s famous notion of *mémoire involontaire*<sup>1083</sup> on the one hand and Aristotle’s concept of *phantasia* on the other.<sup>1084</sup> For Walter Benjamin, the idea of *voluntary memory*, is one of an empty continuum, which is to be redeemed in the instant of recognition, similarly to Proust’s *involuntary memory*. As the Benjamin scholar Aniruddha Chowdhury has argued in this regard, this ‘time of involuntary memory is convoluted, intertwined time,’ and is opposed to the boundless time of historicism.<sup>1085</sup> Aristotle, then,

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<sup>1079</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1080</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1081</sup> The idea of time as an image in Proust is of course a very influential one, as I have argued with a number of authors, specifically with regards to Walter Benjamin. See Chapter 4. For further reading about Benjamin’s Proust image, see: Carol Jacobs, ‘Walter Benjamin. Image of Proust,’ in Peter Osborne (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, (Abingdon; New York, Routledge, 2005), p. 90-109

<sup>1082</sup> Krisanna M. Scheiter, ‘Images, Appearances, and *Phantasia* in Aristotle,’ in *Phronesis*, Vol. 57, (2012), pp. 251-278

<sup>1083</sup> For a discussion of the interpretation of Proust and Bergson by Benjamin, see Chapter 4 in this dissertation. See also Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin and Andreas Mayor (Vol. 7); revised by D.J. Enright, (London, Chatto and Windus; New York, The Modern Library, 1992)

<sup>1084</sup> See Krisanna M. Scheiter, ‘Images, Appearances, and *Phantasia* in Aristotle,’ in *Phronesis*, Vol. 57, (2012)

<sup>1085</sup> Chowdhury Aniruddha, *Memory, Modernity, Repetition: Walter Benjamin’s History*, in *Telos*, Vol. 43 (Summer 2008), p. 35. Aniruddha explains that ‘the time lag, the lateness, that characterizes the structure of experience and of temporality of modernity also structures the remembering work of Proust. In “The Image of Proust,” Benjamin quotes Jacques Rivière’s enigmatic observation that “Proust died of the same inexperience which permitted him to write his works” (Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” p. 213).’ For the author the word ‘inexperience’ in this quotation ‘does not so much mean a simple lack of experience as, rather, a time-lag *in* experience.

explains in *De Memoria* that *phantasia* is that ‘which produces something before the eye, just like the image-making (*eidōlopoiountes*) that occurs in memory.’<sup>1086</sup> As the scholar Krisanna M. Scheiter explains, for Aristotle ‘memory involves recognizing images as things that we have experienced in the past. In other words, memory is an image that is accompanied by the perception of time. But not all images involve the perception of time; specifically, images involved in thought, dreaming, and perception will not require the perception of time.’<sup>1087</sup>

In brief, Feldman’s essay is concerned with the idea of *experiential* time and critiques the notion of ‘clocktime’ as Bergson postulated (as *temps espace* or spatialized time). This empty, mechanical time stands against the *abstract experience* which – counter-intuitively, perhaps – Feldman found in the work of the abstract expressionist painters. It refers to the quality of a painting which seeks to conceive of the temporal as an indelible aspect of the actual object. He writes precisely that ‘this is the area which the visual arts later began to explore. This is the area which music, deluded that it was counting out the seconds, has neglected.’<sup>1088</sup> As I have argued, Benjamin’s critique of universalist and historicist’s conception of time – the additive method of the ‘mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time’<sup>1089</sup> – is crucial to this understanding.

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Experience itself is structured by this lag.’ In the reference to the “the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism” (ibid., p. 157), ‘experience means the empty message of information that we can recollect at will. This empty (in)experience is the basis of what Proust calls *voluntary memory*, “one that is in the service of the intellect” (ibid., p. 158).’ It is, however, the ‘true dramas and experiences of existence that call on us, but which “we the masters” “never (have) time to live,”’ which ‘*become* experience only in the instant of spontaneous remembrance. This is the domain of Proustean *involuntary memory*.’

<sup>1086</sup> Ibid., p. 269

<sup>1087</sup> Ibid., p. 269

<sup>1088</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Between Categories,’ *op. cit.*, p. 83-89

<sup>1089</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p. 254. See *On the concept of history, progress*, [...] in this thesis

Feldman illustrates this approach by referring to a conversation he had with Karlheinz Stockhausen, who remarked that ‘You know Morty – we don’t live in Heaven but down here on Earth;’<sup>1090</sup> clearly a reference to his idea of a physicist, purely chronological conception of time (‘earth time’), which ironically is opposed to heavenly, ideal time. Obviously, he misunderstood Feldman’s conception of time as both an essential element in the musical work of art – its temporality – as well its relation to the idea of an image, as an *image-in-time*. However, Feldman continues his anecdote with the following:

[Stockhausen] began beating on the table and said: “*A sound exists here – or here – or here.*” He was convinced that he was demonstrating reality to me. That the beat, and the possible placement of sounds in relation to it, was the only thing the composer could realistically hold on to.<sup>1091</sup>

For Feldman, it is the reduction of the temporal into ‘so much [as] a square foot,’ which made Stockhausen ‘think Time was something he could handle and even parcel out pretty much as he pleased.’<sup>1092</sup> This absolute view of time as a matter to be manipulated, obviously makes an abstraction of the experience of time, or rather, *eliminates* it altogether. In that case, it could be argued along respectively Bergsonian and even Benjaminian lines, firstly, that time has been *spatialized* to an absolute level, at least at the conceptualized level of the compositional technique, and secondly, as incapable of reaching the listener in more than a shock-like fashion (*Chocklerlebnis*) and thus never allowing for the transitioning to a level of *knowledge* (*Erkenntnis*). For Stockhausen, at least in the light of Feldman’s critique, time is simply this shapeless time of the clock. Feldman condemns this approach as ‘frankly boring.’ He states that

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<sup>1090</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Between Categories,’ *op. cit.*

<sup>1091</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1092</sup> Ibid.

I am not a clockmaker. I am interested in getting Time in its unstructured existence. That is, I am interested in how this wild beast lives in the jungle – not in the zoo. I am interested in how Time exists before we put our paws on it – our minds our imaginations, into it.<sup>1093</sup>

The idea of controlling time *at all*, as part of a traditional conceptual framework of the composer's craft, is anathema to Feldman. In fact, the above critique can be seen as a parallel with the critique of Benjamin and Adorno of a universal theory of temporality, as outlined above. In order to let time unfold in an un-systematized way – or more precisely, in a non-dramatic or non-linear fashion – Feldman insists on the notion of *surface*:

My obsession with surface is the subject of my music. In that sense, my compositions are really not 'compositions' at all. One might call them time canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of the music. I have learned that the more one composes or constructs, the more one prevents Time Undisturbed from becoming the controlling metaphor of the music.<sup>1094</sup>

For Feldman, in other words, compositional method is to be deconstructed into an art where the experience of time is to be valued above the pure *structuring* of traditional conceptions of technique. This means that his argument does not go against the temporal essence (in Adorno's words) of music, but against an essentially physicalist understanding of time. Although the above notion of a 'time canvas' may be misleading, it is possible that the crux of the argument lies in the following: Feldman strives towards a music where the objects form themselves as it were, in the space he has set up – an idea which goes back to his early composition such as the *Intersections* – where a certain sound-object could be seen to emerge *between* the categorical (subjective) act of composition-as-construction (or giving form to the material to paraphrase Adorno) and the objects themselves. In other words, Feldman advocates a utopian approach, at least in theory, of letting these sound-objects (as *per* the individual instrumental images) exist as objects-amongst-

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<sup>1093</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1094</sup> Ibid.

objects in the Benjaminian sense.<sup>1095</sup> This is obviously located on the side of the composer's intention and is therefore subjective; however, as an aesthetic position it is remarkably close to a reconceptualised idea of *musique informelle*. This is to be understood in the sense of Borio's argument in favour of an aesthetics of the *informel*, precisely permitting the dialectical bottom-up approach to the creation of form. This means that an overarching, reified form is not imposed on the material. In other words, a 'spatialized' music is critically possible through the mediation of the parts and the whole (in Adorno's terms), in the process allowing for a certain degree of *unification* in the work (as works of art are wont to – they present themselves as such to us). The tension of the resistance to totalization on the one hand, and fragmentariness on the other, are translated here by Feldman in terms of the constructive element of musical technique on the one hand, and what he terms *surface* on the other:

Both these terms – Space, Time – have come to be used in music and the visual arts as well as in mathematics, literature, philosophy and science. But, though music and the visual arts may be dependent on these other fields for their terminology – the research and results involved are very different. For example, when I first invented a music that allowed various choices to the performer, those who were knowledgeable in mathematical theory decried the term 'indeterminate' or 'random' in relation to these musical ideas. Composers, however, insisted that what I was doing had nothing to do with music.<sup>1096</sup>

Feldman sees himself, importantly, as walking this thin line between these categories:

What then was it? What is it still? I prefer to think of my work as *between categories*. Between Time and Space. Between painting and music. Between the music's construction and its surface.<sup>1097</sup>

For Feldman, the 'medium, whether it be the sounds of John Cage or the clay of Giacometti, can be [...] incomprehensible.'<sup>1098</sup> If understood as (musical) material and how to 'handle' it – the

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<sup>1095</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>1096</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Between Categories,' op. cit.

<sup>1097</sup> Ibid.



question as to the condition of the modernist artwork – reminds of the questions Adorno asked in ‘Vers une musique informelle,’ specifically with regard to technique and the future of *form* in music. As Feldman continues, it becomes clear how close his position is to this critique:

Technique can only structure it [the medium]. This is the mistake we make. It is this structure and only this structure, that becomes comprehensible to us. By putting the ‘wild beast’ in a cage, all we preserve is a specimen whose life we can now completely control. So much of what we call art is made in the same way – as one collects exotic animals for a zoo.<sup>1099</sup>

Finally, Feldman compares the artwork, as a historical entity – something which has lived through various periods of the history of art – with the status of the artist (in this case, Paul Cézanne).

What do we see when looking at Cézanne? Well – we see how Art has survived – we also see how the artist has survived. If our interest lies in discovering how Art has survived, we are on safe ground. If our interest lies in how Cézanne, the artist survived, then we’re in trouble – which is where we should be.<sup>1100</sup>

It seems that the question as to how art has survived to the modern day is still of central importance to Feldman. For him there exists a tension between the two levels, of surface and construction. Or in other words, in the illusion and the technique on which it is based (and behind which it hides). Whilst it is possible to analyse the artwork from this perspective, Feldman concludes that

I have a theory. The artist reveals himself in his surface. His escape into History is his construction. Cézanne wanted it both ways. If we ask him, “*Are you Cézanne or are you History?*” His answer is, “*Choose*

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<sup>1098</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1099</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1100</sup> Ibid.

*either one at your peril.*” His ambivalence between being Cézanne and being History has become a symbol of our own dilemma.<sup>1101</sup>

The question then remains: how to survive as an artist through one’s *constructions* – seen here to constitute the artwork – or being historical *through* one’s works. Perhaps, as Sebastian Claren reads this, Feldman considers construction to be an escape into history, whilst the surface refers to the acoustic reality.<sup>1102</sup> The answer lies in a technique and an aesthetics which refuse to be called either surface (illusion) or pure construction. Feldman himself considered the music of Varèse and his own as examples of a music which attempted to let the construction and surface elements disappear in one another, in contrast to traditional conceptions of music.<sup>1103</sup> This conception of musical technique constitutes a rather unique artistic programme, one which is self-consciously aware of the pressures of the rationalization, trauma and artistic *phantasmagoria*. In other words, the musical breaks through the pretensions of the need for the obvious shocks, the absurdist mask which hides the inept, the failed, the detritus and retains something of what Benjamin and Adorno found to act as an agent in their philosophies of historical time. The insistence on remaining critical of, on the one hand, mundane revelation of the *composer-as-artist* (the grand gesture of the commentary as justification, or better, *mystification*), in itself a romantic throwback, and on the other hand composition as a way to control the destiny of one’s

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<sup>1101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1102</sup> See Sebastian Claren, *Neither*, op. cit., p. 158: ‘Im Bereich der Bildenden Kunst trifft sich Feldmans neues Argument, Musik sei keine Kunstform, da sie zu sehr von den Erwartungen des Publikums abhängig ist, mit seinem alten Argument, Musik sei keine abstrakte Kunst, da sie sich weder von ihren äußerlichen Funktionen befreit habe, noch die Trennung von Konstruktion als ‘Flucht in die Geschichte’ und Oberfläche als ‘akustischer Realität’ jemals aufgehoben habe.’ Feldman’s ‘new argument’ refers here to his description of the working of his *String Quartet*, ‘where one’s sense of time is somewhat more displaced than in a musical composition, and where chronological information aids our insight in understanding the ‘story’, rather than the cause and effect ‘syndrome’ which is so indigenous to how we listen to music.’ In Morton Feldman, *String Quartet*, programme notes *Cal Arts Contemporary Music Festival* 81, Los Angeles, 1981, p. 4

<sup>1103</sup> Claren, op. cit., p. 158

reputation, are crucial to the understanding of Feldman's aesthetics. Within the framework of this thesis's main argument, this stance can be seen to avoid the philosophical conceptualizations Benjamin and Adorno criticized. Moreover, this points to the realization that a work leads a life of its own; as an object it is a message in a bottle, in the sense that its journey is not predetermined, and that message might not be received until later, or, in another place. Finally, the modernist work of art as it reveals its truth content here, speaks an abstract language; one which is not music in the traditional sense (of motivic-thematicism) nor is it the dreaded music-as-pseudo-painting. What it says is simply that the historically necessary state of the musical material is not always clear and cannot be easily determined from the narrative structure of chronological unfoldings. In other words, the causal, historicist perspective is undone – evolving a music which explicitly resists this by freeing the temporal from the expectations of a linear process.

### Conceptualization and perception: naming and the real

As I will currently show, Feldman's thinking was influenced by a number of authors, some in quite fundamental ways. Furthermore, these ideas he acquired and developed allowed him to express the relationship between what he understood as reality and the way in which human beings, artists, composers, listeners conceive of the works presented. One particular element of this interaction, as I have shown in earlier chapters, is concerned with the role of such concepts and conceptualizations, and Benjamin's thinking in images. It is precisely this aspect of Feldman's thinking which is the focus here. His aesthetics are strongly concerned with the tension between conceptual and perceptual thinking. In his *Darmstadt Lecture* (1984),<sup>1104</sup> Feldman describes in a substantial passage the difference between what he calls a conceptual way of thinking versus a perceptual way of thinking in *images*. It seems to have been as crucial as Benjamin's own way of allowing for a conceptualization of a certain type, one which does not control its material or its objects in a such a way as to reduce them to an a-historic and neutral sort of raw material. In fact, he explicitly refers to Henri Bergson, specifically his theory of perception. Referring to his recently performed composition, Feldman explains that it is 'involved with two aspects which I feel are less conceptual and more realistic. I'm interested in realistic things, actually. We'll talk about concepts.'<sup>1105</sup> For him, as for Benjamin, conceptualizations begin with *naming* things, which he strongly tries to avoid: 'So I try not to give something a name. That's very, very important to me.'<sup>1106</sup>

He then turns to the younger composers and explains that since antiquity a split between conceptual and perceptual ways of thinking has existed. However, he then refers to Bergson:

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<sup>1104</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Darmstadt Lecture,' in Walter Zimmermann (ed.), *Morton Feldman Essays*, (Kerpen, Beginner Press, 1985), pp. 181-213

<sup>1105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1106</sup> Ibid.

But if we take Henri Bergson seriously, he reminds us essentially of two ways of expressing ourselves; one is conceptually, and the other by way of images.<sup>1107</sup>

Explicitly referring to Einstein as well as implying that the discoverer of the double helix in DNA, James Watson, needed an image before they would describe it mathematically. Feldman claims that this is essentially how he works. However, for Feldman ‘there’s a confusion between the conceptual and the images.’<sup>1108</sup> He situates this confusion in the mistaken idea that an image is to be made, in programmatic terms – which he sees as the reason for a large percentage of the world’s music being ‘programmatic.’<sup>1109</sup>

You can’t just say, ‘I’m going to make an image, an instrumental image.’ Try and think of the history of contemporary music. At the beginning of the twentieth century, how many instrumental images do you find? Do we ever get together what an instrumental image is?<sup>1110</sup>

After pointing towards the slow movement of Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto for an example of an instrumental image, he refers to the work of Samuel Beckett. The idea of Beckett’s working with images is now well established.<sup>1111</sup>

There are many, many people who work this way, but in other fields. Samuel Beckett, not in everything he does, but in a lot of things he does. He would write something in English, translate it into French, than translate that thought back into the English that conveys that thought.<sup>1112</sup> And I know he keeps on doing it.<sup>1113</sup>

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<sup>1107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1111</sup> Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006); Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett*, (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2008); Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and Music*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998)

<sup>1112</sup> Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-325 deals with the issue of translation in Feldman’s work. He dispels this myth that Beckett did do such retranslations.

<sup>1113</sup> Morton Feldman, ‘Darmstadt Lecture,’ *op. cit.*

Feldman refers to the text of the opera *Neither*, which

He wrote something for me in 1977, and I got it. I'm reading it. There's something particular. I can't catch it. Finally I see that every line is really the same thought said in another way. And yet the continuity acts as if something else is happening. Nothing else is happening. What you're doing in an almost Proustian way is getting deeper and deeper saturated into the thought.<sup>1114</sup>

This description of his compositional *praxis* is rather intuitive, but underneath the translation of an idea into music, Feldman carefully chooses to avoid calling it a *musical* idea:

What I do then is, I translate, say something, into a pitchy situation. And then I do it where it's more intervallic, and I take the suggestions of that back into another kind of pitchiness – not the original pitchiness, and so forth, and so on. Always retranslating and then saying, now let's do it with another kind of focus.<sup>1115</sup>

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<sup>1114</sup> Morton Feldman, 'Darmstadt Lecture,' *op. cit.*

<sup>1115</sup> Ibid.

### Feldman and Bergson: influences and interpretations

Feldman's contrasting of conceptual and perceptual thought seems to be related to Henri Bergson's two most important works: *Mémoire et matière* (1896) and *L'évolution créatrice* (1907). In *Memory and Matter. Essay on the relation of body and spirit*, Bergson developed a theory of cognition in which external perception is only possible through reliance on internal images. It was written in reaction to a work by Théodule Ribot, *The Maladies of Memory* (1881), who claimed that neuroscience had proven that memory can be located within the brain and is therefore of a purely material, static nature. Bergson presented an anti-reductionist stance, and presents a theory of cognition which is based on the interaction of perception and memory. Two types of memory are of importance: habitual, practical memory, and pure memory. The latter registers the past in the remembrance of images, which represents and recognizes the past as *past*. This memory is contemplative and in Bergson's opinion fundamentally spiritual. With *L'évolution créatrice* (*Creative evolution*) Bergson attempted to write a *philosophical* natural history (an idea Benjamin also took up, as I have shown in Chapter 3 and 4). Language in this view is the great mediator between consciousness and the outside world. As Bergson specifies:

An intelligence which reflects is one that originally had a surplus of energy to spend, over and above practically useful efforts. It is a consciousness that has virtually reconquered itself. But still the virtual has to become actual. Without language, intelligence would probably have remained riveted to the material objects which it was interested in considering.<sup>1116</sup>

For Bergson, the distinction between 'intelligence' and the material world is filtered by language. Bergson describes the process from the perception of an object, to its naming, via the image:

Language has greatly contributed to its liberation. The word, made to pass from one thing to another, is, in fact, by nature transferable and free. It can therefore be extended, not only from one perceived thing to another, but even from a perceived thing to a recollection of that thing, from the precise

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<sup>1116</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 159

recollection to a more fleeting image, and finally from an image fleeting, though still pictured [representée], to the picturing [représentation] of the act by which the image is pictured [representée], that is to say, to the idea.<sup>1117</sup>

He concludes that

Thus is revealed to the intelligence, hitherto always turned outwards, a whole internal world—the spectacle of its own workings.<sup>1118</sup>

Next, Bergson states that intelligence or intellect must, in order

to think itself clearly and distinctly, perceive itself under the form of discontinuity. Concepts, in fact, are outside each other, like objects in space; and they have the same stability as such objects, on which they have been modeled. Taken together, they constitute an "intelligible world," that resembles the world of solids in its essential characters, but whose elements are lighter, more diaphanous, easier for the intellect to deal with than the image of concrete things: they are not, indeed, the perception itself of things, but the representation of the act by which the intellect is fixed on them. They are, therefore, not images, but symbols.<sup>1119</sup>

In the fourth Chapter of his *Evolution créatrice*, Bergson presents the 'cinematographical mechanism of thought'

But, preoccupied before everything with the necessities of action, the intellect, like the senses, is limited to taking, at intervals, views that are instantaneous and by that very fact immobile of the becoming of matter. Consciousness, being in its turn formed on the intellect, sees clearly of the inner life what is already made, and only feels confusedly the making. Thus, we pluck out of duration those moments that interest us, and that we have gathered along its course. These alone we retain. And we are right in so doing, while action only is in question. But when, in speculating on the nature of the real, we go on regarding it as our practical interest requires us to regard it, we become unable to perceive the true evolution, the radical becoming. Of becoming we perceive only states, of duration

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<sup>1117</sup> Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 159

<sup>1118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1119</sup> *ibid.*



only instants, and even when we speak of duration and of becoming, it is of another thing that we are thinking. Such is the most striking of the two illusions we wish to examine. It consists in supposing that we can think the unstable by means of the stable, the moving by means of the immobile.<sup>1120</sup>

Sebastian Claren proposes an understanding of the analogies and the differences between Bergson's and Feldman's theories, as it would lead too far

to translate Bergson's theory in terms of Feldman's understanding of the instrumental image, as the image to Bergson himself played only the subordinate role of a mediator between reality and perception. Much closer would be to accept that Feldman, as well as Bergson, Einstein and James D. Watson, the researcher of DNA, proposes above all as a confirmation of it, that the image is considered as immediate perception or immediate representation not only in the arts, but is also used in philosophy and in the natural sciences as the necessary point of departure for complex thought processes, which lead to an exact outcome.<sup>1121</sup>

This seems to stand in direct opposition to the modernist modes of perception, as technologically mediated 'seeing'. Examples abound, but one is the emergence of truly mechanical ways of seeing: X-ray technology, electronic microscopes, cinema. Proust presents another aspect of this new perception, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>1122</sup> In Claren's opinion the instrumental image stands for the approach,

which starts from the assumption of the perception as *immediate, given* material and only later progresses towards the concept, in order to elaborate this perception in detail, in contrast to an

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<sup>1120</sup> Henri Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 159

<sup>1121</sup> Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*, p. 233

<sup>1122</sup> cf. Sarah Danius gives the example of the blows raining down on Proust's friend – although only one man was hitting, it looked as if there were more than two fists. Also: problems with conception of memory/Erinnerung/Gedächtnis/Eingedenken/ see Gérard Raulet, *Le caractère destructeur*, p. 141: Benjamin, Proust, Freud, Adorno: memory/forgetting/the precise way something is forgotten is constitutive of the way in which one remembers, according to Adorno.

approach which starts from models as concepts fixed in advance and inserts the material only afterwards as immediate appearance into this construction.<sup>1123</sup>

According to Claren, Feldman – with reference to the Darmstadt Lecture above – tries ‘not to give something a name, which seems to refer to his adversity to conceptualising the image, instead opting for a fusion between concept and image.’<sup>1124</sup> In that sense, plans or models as concepts do not precede the image – which, if it did exist, would lead to a straightforward execution of this plan. In Feldman’s view, further according to Claren, the instrumental image is devoid of conceptual calculations and finds itself in disagreement with any form of programmatic meaning whilst presenting itself as ‘immediate perception’ [*unmittelbare Wahrnehmung*].<sup>1125</sup>

In this reading of Feldman’s text, I would argue that Claren misrepresents Feldman’s position, especially in light of his pleading in favour of a struggle against both the conceptual and the perceptual modes of thought; he also says there is a confusion between the two. I would speak of a dialectic, in the same sense as his earlier argument as to his position *between categories*. If an instrumental image is at all possible, it surely is conceived of in a way in which intuition and compositional technique are brought together. This does claim to be neither pure intuition, nor mechanical, *automatic* technique.

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<sup>1123</sup> Sebastian Claren, op. cit., p. 121

<sup>1124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1125</sup> Ibid.

### Instrumental image and the visual arts

The notion of the instrumental image itself warrants a further inquiry. According to Claren, Feldman considers the instrumental image as a self-contained unit, which is formed out of homogenous material and which does not have a connection to the surrounding elements of the composition. In the following quotation, Claren explains the deceptive nature of Feldman's own memory of just such an image:

Important for Feldman, the image has to impress its potential energy of memory immediately, whilst he concludes by referring to the Stravinsky's Violin Concerto as an example. His memory of this image seems to be selective, as the Concerto opens with a violin trio, which opens every new movement of the Concerto (against the rest of the orchestra). The Flute plays the same melody as the first violin, the trumpet doubles in the octave. However, this motif returns four times almost unchanged and without development; it comes and goes as a unit, which Feldman proposes as an example of the instrumental image.<sup>1126</sup>

An important aspect of the image, as demonstrated in terms of memory on the one hand, can be found, on the other hand, in the inspiration Feldman found elsewhere. His work was strongly influenced by his friendship with the painters of the 'New York School.'<sup>1127</sup> In answer to a question at Middelburg in 1987, he referred to them in terms of the role of the image in their respective work.<sup>1128</sup> In his work he himself was looking for an 'unchanging image,' which seems

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<sup>1126</sup> Sebastian Claren, *op. cit.*

<sup>1127</sup> See Dieter Gutknecht, 'Aural Eyeness, Unti Die Contratto Tra Musica E Arte Figurativa Nell'espressionismo Astratto E Nella New York School, Ii, Sulla Concesione Della Musica Cosidetta New York School,' in *Musica/Realtà* November 18 (1996), pp. 54-65; Steven Johnson, *New York Schools of Music and Art*, (New York, Routledge, 2001); Suzanne Jusek, *The New York School. Earle Brown, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff*, (Saarbrücken, Pfau, 1998); Amy C. Beal, "'Time Canvasses", Morton Feldman and the Painters of the New York School,' in James Leggio (ed.), *Music and Modern Art*, (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, Border Crossings), (New York, Routledge, 2002), pp. 227-246

<sup>1128</sup> Feldman, Morton, and Raoul Mörchen, *Morton Feldman in Middelburg. Words on Music - Lectures and Conversations = Worte Über Musik - Vorträge und Gespräche*, Gisela Grönemeyer, and Reinhard Oehlschlägel (eds.) 2 Vols. (Cologne, Musiktexte, 2008)

to move, but actually only has ‘the energy to keep it self up’.<sup>1129</sup> In relation to this, Feldman referred to Jackson Pollock, from whom he learnt ‘how to keep the motion going, at the same time understanding the notion of stasis’, and from Mark Rothko, how to keep the stasis intact and still find the energy for motion.’<sup>1130</sup> Pollock and Rothko were for Feldman opposites in a dialectical way: ‘The one is motion/movement in the stasis/standstill, the other stasis/standstill in movement.’<sup>1131</sup> In Jasper John’s work, he discovered ‘the possibility of an image’, whilst Philip Guston ‘had an image, without having an image’.<sup>1132</sup> He even asked the question ‘is it by nature that you have an image?’<sup>1133</sup> Alternatively, Feldman asked if he is looking for an image, or if he lets it happen, or more fundamentally, does one need one at all? In any case, he says, there will be an image, if he thinks about it or not, if he looks for it or not.

*My Projections and Intersections* is a weight either reminiscent or discovered. Weight for me does not have its source in the realm of dynamics or tensions, but rather reciting from a visual-aural response to sound as an image [my stress] gone inward creating a general synthesis. Weight involves the finding of a pulse which allows for a natural fluidity. Discovered weight implies discovered balance. Discovered balance implies discovered movement from this pulse. The notation is presented graphically where each box is a clock time duration. What is desired in the execution is a pure non-vibrating tone.<sup>1134</sup>

As I have argued before, Feldman would change his conception of time considerably in later works.

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<sup>1129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1134</sup> Everett Helm, ‘Current Chronicle,’ in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 38), p. 138

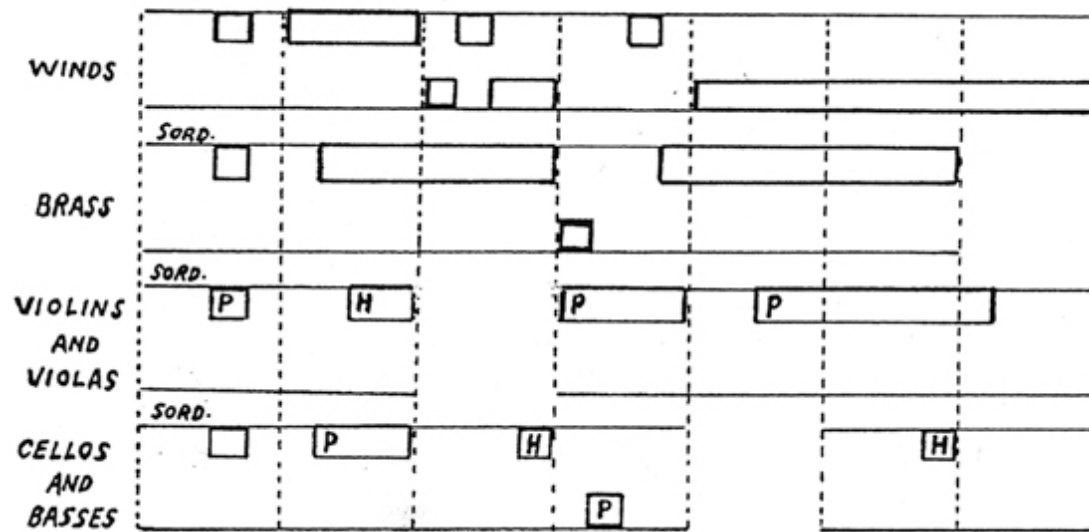


Figure 23: Morton Feldman, *Intersection I* (1962)

Feldman seems to understand the sound as an internal/inward image which forms the basis for a synthesis – a balance of the weight of individual sounds in relation to the natural flow of the pulse. Claren compares this to paintings by Piet Mondriaan, whose coloured rectangular and square shapes are divided by thick black lines, whose ‘weight’ is characterised not only by their size, but also their colour and form. In other words, a tension is created between these fields of colour and the black lines. In the same way, sounds are not only fixed in relation to the flow or pulses, but also through their timbre, number of notes and register. In the same sense that Mondriaan is searching for a balance in his paintings, whose individual parts are imbalanced if observed by themselves, Feldman’s syntheses seem to be related to the whole work, in which the individual weight of the different sounds is suspended in the balance between them. This balance, however, has nothing to do with conventional musical *gestures*, but instead is related only to the acoustic characteristics of the sounds as weights within a regular flow of time as a ‘pulse.’

### Image versus motif

Moreover, Feldman's concern with images can also be seen in his treatment of individual chords and chord pairs as images, (see comments on *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957)),<sup>1135</sup> which are repeated up to five times. These repetitions are situated in a closed field, with rhythmical shifts between the four pianos. Feldman doesn't, however, seem to treat his compositions as overall closed objects, which begins at a particular point and ends at a particular point, but instead begins as if the repeated chords had already been there beforehand and are simply 'recognised.' In the same way the 'weights' in *Projections* and *Intersections* were reminisced or discovered. In this sense, the beginning of the piece lacks an opening gesture, but produces a pair of chords, which potentially sound as if they had been repeated a number of times before the piece has started, in the same way as at the end, where the rhythmical shifts of the four pianos would often be as complex as possible, whilst here, a flageolet in the piano seems to merge into silence. In terms of the sparsity of a work like this, Feldman argues in his Darmstadt lecture:

I find that as the piece gets longer, there has to be less material. That the piece itself, strangely enough cannot take it. [...] I don't have a psychological situation[...] I don't have any anxiety that I've got to stop. But there's less going into it, so I think the piece dies a natural death. It dies of old age. Like a cousin of mine said to his daughter, "Sweetie, pull out the tube."<sup>1136</sup>

In *Durations 3* for violin, tuba and piano (1961), Feldman explains that 'with the tuba, the weight of the three instruments has made me treat them as one. I wrote all sounds simultaneously because I knew that none of the instruments ought to be ahead or behind. Through thinning and thickening my sounds I kept the image intact.'<sup>1137</sup>

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<sup>1135</sup> Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987*, op. cit., p. 88

<sup>1136</sup> 'Darmstadt Lecture,' in *Morton Feldman Essays*, Walter Zimmermann (ed.), (Kerpen, Beginner Press, 1985), pp. 181-213

<sup>1137</sup> Morton Feldman, *Brown/Feldman*, liner notes (New York, Time Records, No. 58007)

It seems that Feldman understood the four short movements of *Durations* as individual, distinct images:

In the first movement the violin part has numerous repeated notes, the tuba sections of ascending chromatic scales and the piano dense chords, which follow one another uninterruptedly and only sometimes resolve in single notes or two-note chords.

The second movement is characterised by the interruptions in all three parts. The violin frequently repeats the f# and g# in different registers, with single a, b and bflat notes as complementing tones, as well as two e flats. The tuba : large intervals and shifted unisono and octave passages as well as chromatic frictions with the two other parts, with more frequent pauses by the end of the piece.<sup>1138</sup>

It is hard to see how these images are kept together through the thinning and thickening, because it is obvious that not only the number of notes that are played simultaneously or in sequence, but also the 'weight' of the instruments and their register. It seems that the voices are treated in the an organ-like fashion, much like the building of a so-called *plenum*, with all the stops, from foundation stops to higher stops and mixtures. A similar representation of the image can be seen in the graphically notated scores of the 1950s, in the way that he treats whole movements and compositions as single complex images, while in *Durations* the individual movements differ in the details, which is not the case in the earlier works.

Another aspect of the image is that it is, according to Feldman in his 'Darmstadt Lecture' mentioned above, something that is remembered, or memorable. The instrumental image in Feldman opinion is not a simple composition-technical concept, but the description of a general quality, which is constituted through intensity of the development of the sound, which can only be obtained through a 'strong belief in the material',<sup>1139</sup> in such a way that it leaves a lasting

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<sup>1138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1139</sup> 'Darmstadt Lecture,' in *Morton Feldman Essays, op. cit.*, pp. 181-213

impression into one's memory. Expansion in time, then, seems necessary in order for the common material in its different instalments, respectively in the repetition in all parts of the image.



### Words and Music – allegorical image and time

As I have argued in Chapters 4, Walter Benjamin and Adorno's philosophies are concerned with language, from the former's language of objects to the latter's considerations of music's language-like aspect. Moreover, as I have shown in the work of Benjamin, the seventeenth-century allegorical *Trauerspiel* reveals characteristics that are thoroughly modern. In the sense that these mourning plays are distinct in their formal conception as well as the way in which they announce modern subjectivity, they are crucial in Benjamin's later work on the Surrealists. The affinities of this work in Adorno's aesthetics are now seen as central to the understanding of the late turn in his work. As I have also argued elsewhere, one of the other important aspects of this development came with Adorno's reading of the work of Samuel Beckett. The notions of meaning, language, and the role modernist music plays in this regard, proved further testament to the role of the particular artworks in the deepening of Adorno's aesthetic considerations, no matter how late in the day they may seem to have come. Combining the reading of these allegorical images with the insights of Benjamin and Adorno's later notion of the dialectical image, new aspects are revealed in the work of Beckett and, moreover, Feldman's music.

By closely considering the music Feldman composed for Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music*, a critique can be formulated of how, traditionally, meaning is constructed as a harmonious totality – as text and music. Beckett himself had a long-standing interest in conceptualizations<sup>1140</sup> of the image, in particular with regard to Henri Bergson.<sup>1141</sup> As to the concept of the allegory, it is exemplified and problematized both as an interaction between characters who *present*<sup>1142</sup>

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<sup>1140</sup> See Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett*, (Bern, Peter Lang, 2008)

<sup>1141</sup> See Anthony Ullman, 'Beckett, Berkeley, Bergson, Film: the intuition image,' in *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 114-128

<sup>1142</sup> For a discussion of the difference between *presentation* and *representation* in the work of Beckett, see Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the philosophical image*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 48: 'A

‘universal’ themes, such as Sloth, Love, Age and (a loved one’s) Face, but also as allegorical *representations* of language (Words) and music (Music).<sup>1143</sup> In other words, for Beckett, these themes cannot be simply subsumed under these general headings; neither does Feldman accept the idea of simply illustrating these words with incidental music. The creation of an *image* combining words and sounds in a radio-studio (and as listened to on the radio), finally, can be seen as a composed, heterogeneous work pointing to a non-linear temporal space. Temporality in this context is like the constructed Age of which the text speaks, a fragmentary notion of time, not a straightforward, natural unfolding.

Beckett’s interest in the image is now the subject of a book-length study by Anthony Uhlman,<sup>1144</sup> who explains that for Beckett, Bergson’s dual concept of the image was a great influence on his own thinking. Towards the end of his life, Morton Feldman wrote several works inspired by Samuel Beckett, including his opera *Neither*, the orchestral work *For Samuel Beckett* and *Words and Music*. In fact, before composing *For Samuel Beckett* Feldman finished the music for the radioplay *Words and Music*. When the New York University Radio Station ‘Voices International’ prepared for a Beckett Festival, it wanted new performances of all of Beckett’s radio plays. Although Beckett was reluctant to give his permission, the music his cousin John Beckett had composed in 1962 did no longer strike him as satisfactory. He suggested to the interviewer, Everett Frost, that

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representation works through the relation of one thing to another: in this sense it is recognised and easily understood. The presentation, on the other hand, is that which has not yet been understood, is that which remains to be interpreted and whose meaning resists being fixed.’

<sup>1143</sup> As Uhlmann writes, ‘for Beckett, over time, the point of focus moves from what is represented (and this does, indeed, remain an important point of focus at least until *Malone dies*) to what is presented to us. Asked what the late play *What Where* means, Beckett is reputed to have answered, ‘I don’t know what it means, don’t ask me what it means, it’s an object.’ These comments are cited on the DVD for the *Beckett on Film* production of *What Where*. *Beckett on Film, 19 Films by 19 Directors*, produced by Michael Colgan and Alan Moloney (Dublin: Blue Angels Films, 2001). Uhlmann, *op. cit.*, p. 49

<sup>1144</sup> Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, *op. cit.*, p. 48

Feldman should compose a new score. Feldman gratefully accepted, even calling it a 'labour of love' and 'almost a tribute.'<sup>1145</sup> He added that he did not think he 'would have spent the time and the concerns on anybody else, actually.'<sup>1146</sup>

*Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, as Feldman entitles his score presents like his opera *Neither* an example of the possible relations between text and music, their expressive possibilities and, more importantly, their limitations. As I have already argued, the work can be understood as a modernist play on (allegorical) images. At the beginning of *Words and Music*, the characters 'Words' – named 'Joe' – and 'Music' – named 'Bob' – are waiting for their master, Croak. In the meantime, 'Music' tunes its 'small orchestra' and 'Words' tries to rattle off a couple of definitions about the theme of 'Sloth'. When Croak eventually shows up he orders them to comment on the theme of 'Love', which leads to Words interrupting the contributions of Music with protestations. For the next theme, 'Age', Croak forces both characters to collaborate, but Words objects until Music plays some melodies. Words develops a poem, 'Age is when to a man', which grows into a song. Music constantly has to correct Words. After their performance of the song, Croak gives them the theme of 'The Face'. Music responds with a 'warmly sentimental' piece of about one minute long. Words describes a woman's face, who obviously played an important role in the life of Croak. After an 'irrepressible burst of spreading and subsiding music', Words and Music begin a second song which begins with 'Then down a little way', which is composed and learned in the same fashion as 'Age is when to a man' (in installments). Croak shuffles away without a word. Words orders Music to play something, and to repeat it. The play ends with a deep sigh of Words.

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<sup>1145</sup> Everett Frost, 'The Note Man on the Word Man, Morton Feldman on Composing the Music for Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music* in *Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*, in Mary Bryden (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and Music*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 47-56, also in *musikTexte*, Vol. 66 (November 1996), p. 44

<sup>1146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49

Beckett's contrasting of Words and Music seems to have had its origins in his text about Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* from 1931, in which he stresses the influence of Schopenhauer on the meaning of music in the work of Proust:

Schopenhauer rejects the Leibnizian view of music as 'occult arithmetic' and distinguishes it in his aesthetic from the other arts.<sup>1147</sup>

After this summary of Schopenhauer's aesthetic, Beckett continues with a critique of opera – particularly its seemingly random forcing together of text and music. Beckett argued that by definition,

opera is a hideous corruption of this most immaterial of all the arts: the words of a libretto are to the musical phrase that they particularize what the Vendôme Column, for example, is to the idea perpendicular. From this point of view opera is less complete than vaudeville, which at least inaugurates the comedy of an exhaustive enumeration. These considerations explain the beautiful invention of the 'da capo' as a testimony to the intimate and ineffable nature of an art that is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable. Music is the catalytic element in the work of Proust.<sup>1148</sup>

This problematic relationship is central to *Words and Music* in that the association between the two is not a *fait accompli*, but it has to be forged in the metaphorical, or more precisely allegorical playing and singing of individual melodies and verses.

Another question is if Words can have any conceptual meaning altogether, as a character with the same tasks to fulfill as Words; a question not really answered by the various themes Croak proposes, although they are particularly emphasized. In this context, Music seems to have a special function which could be deduced from Schopenhauer's aesthetic in the general opposition of Music as the language of feeling and passion, and words as the language of reason.<sup>1149</sup>

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<sup>1147</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, (London, Chatto and Windus, 1931), p. 92

<sup>1148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1149</sup> Ibid.

This opposition of reason and feeling becomes clear when words can only rattle off dry definitions and can find a more lyrical style if forced, while Music immediately begins with ‘great expression’; Words coldly responds.

### **Words and music, self and other**

Sebastian Claren argues that when Words and Music

embody new metaphors in the long series of Beckett’s representations of human consciousness, *Words and Music* would suggest that the voices Beckett’s characters hear are just one area, while ‘Feelings and Passions’ are a second area, which is not connected to concepts, but can under certain circumstances be brought into contact with them. In any case, the dramatic persons ‘Neither’ from the opera *Neither* as a non-definable point between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ and Croak as Master of Words and Music two metaphors for the same thing, which in relation to two different problems – its subjective material (‘Words’ and ‘Music’) and its objective possibilities (‘Self’ and ‘Other’) – is examined and represents Beckett’s ‘unique theme’.<sup>1150</sup>

Feldman called the *Words and Music* project ‘the happiest of all the things that I have done,’<sup>1151</sup> because he did not have to set a fixed text to music, but had only indications to contend with such as ‘Age,’ ‘Music of Love and Soul’ etc.. The actual problem with Words and Music for Feldman was what Beckett mentions at the end of his Proust essay: that in contrast to Literature, ‘there’s no universals in music unless you want to adapt to the language that came before you, as role models’, so ‘it’s incongruous the minute you get away from cliché type of responses.’<sup>1152</sup>

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<sup>1150</sup> Sebastian Claren, p. 505

<sup>1151</sup> Everett Frost, ‘The Note Man and the Word Man,’ *op. cit.*, p. 50

<sup>1152</sup> Ibid.

In relation to other compositions on texts by Beckett, Feldman argued that they are ‘histrionic’ for their treatment of Beckett as an existential hero instead of a tragic one and their ‘conventional word painting’ and ‘your memory’s going to go into this composer, into that composer, and it’ll just be a cliché ridden score.’<sup>1153</sup> Feldman himself said ‘you just couldn’t go looking for a score’ with which he could translate Beckett’s directions into music but wanted to meet Beckett halfway by keeping a distance. He also avoided to define the counterparts to Beckett’s directions, but instead engaged with the structural and technical problems of the composition:

See, it’s a – I can’t disentangle the technical way of arriving at it and what it is, because it’s both – it’s a technical metaphor, and a technical metaphor then brings forth – hopefully – the psychological or the emotional or the dramatic situation.<sup>1154</sup>

This *bringing forth* through technical means is a powerful image in itself, and could be seen as Feldman’s reading of Beckett’s text in *poietic* terms.<sup>1155</sup>

For this reason, Feldman has also tried to work with instrumental images, in order to create contrast between the sections, ‘so one remembers this against this, this against that.’<sup>1156</sup> From this material the ‘atmosphere’ of the radio play should develop almost by itself. Instead of a

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<sup>1153</sup> It is noteworthy in this regard that Feldman refers here to the vagaries of one’s memory – a topic of interest to Beckett, for example in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, where a man remembers his birthdays of the past via a number of recordings of himself at an earlier age.

<sup>1154</sup> Everett Frost, ‘The Note Man on the Word Man, Morton Feldman on Composing the Music for Samuel Beckett’s *Words and Music*’, in Mary Bryden (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and Music*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 49

<sup>1155</sup> It reminds of the Heideggerian notion of *technè* in the essay concerning technology. If we continue to pursue the question of the essence of technology, Heidegger argues, we will come to see that technology is a kind of *poiesis*, a way of bringing forth or revealing (p.34) – and, as such, is ‘the realm of truth’ and ‘if we understand technology as deriving from this concept of *techne*, Heidegger continues, then we will see that its essence lies not in the instrumental production of goods or manipulation of materials, but in ‘revealing.’ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, transl. and intro. by William Lovitt, (New York and London, Garland, 1977)

<sup>1156</sup> Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman Says*, *op. cit.*, p. 236

conventional interpretation of the directions, as John Beckett had done, Feldman started working from within his own musical language, which he however adapted to the situation. Normally, he says, ‘I give myself a lot of time,’ but here the prefixed course of the text didn’t give him any time, forcing him to ‘choose metaphors’:

after just five seconds I am in the world: there’s no set up, there’s no preparation, you have to begin in the world of the – of that (snapping his fingers) response.<sup>1157</sup>

Furthermore, Feldman remarks that in contrast with his own Beckett-music and the other settings, ‘someone has to have had a language of their own in order to give it up.’<sup>1158</sup>

Feldman’s music consists of 36 sections, which correspond with the directions of Beckett’s scenario. The first three sections are not notated, as the small orchestra consisting of two flutes, vibraphone and string trio tunes its instruments. For the first time since his student compositions before 1950, the score is not set in *pianissimo* but in *mezzo piano*, the first indication of a concession to the dramaturgic demands of the text; Beckett’s *fortissimo* outbursts of ‘Music’ are reduced in any case to *mezzo forte*. As Claren notes,<sup>1159</sup> the specific basic material of the individual sections consists of three elements: a minor seventh divided over two parts and mostly repeated within one part, which appears for the first time in the “Here I am” (Nr. 4); secondly, a three-note motif consisting of the notes b2, a2 and g2, accompanied by its “shadow” a1, g1 and f1, which appears for the first time in Music of Love and Soul (nr. 10)

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<sup>1157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1159</sup> Claren, *op. cit.*, p. 505

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10 *Rap of Baton.*

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Figure 24: Morton Feldman, *Words and Music, (No. 10), p. 3*

Thirdly, there are ascending and descending diatonic scales with different notes, which are used for the music to the 'Age is when to a man' and 'Then down a little way.' Other elements are too general to be counted as basic material.



6

19 20

1. FL. 2. FL.

VIB.

PF.

VN.

VLA.

VC.

21 22

1. FL. 2. FL.

VIB.

PF.

VN.

VLA.

VC.

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Figure 25: Morton Feldman, *Words and Music*, (Nos. 19-22), p. 6

However, the question as to what constitutes the basic material is highly problematic and not always fruitful, especially since Feldman thinks in terms of orchestration/timbre rather than purely pitch related. In this regard, neither for the practicing of the texts of both songs (as

indicated by Beckett), nor for the complete performance did Feldman indicate a precise setting of text *to* music, but notated a series of scales in different orchestrations. They only vaguely articulate the proportions of the text. As Feldman explained,

No, I didn't measure it to the text, but I created a composite line of the first line to my scale, which was essentially my, my air. A-I-R. And then, musically, I tried to work with it, it's symmetries or asymmetries, but not that directly. It was only the first line that gave me his rhythm and pacing. And then, hopefully, I felt that I would have a sense of proportion that he does. And I was right actually. [...] Again, it was like working in the dark and, and I got there [earlier comment about Zen and he art of Archery in the dark; German practiced with lights on, Buddhists broke his bow...]. You couldn't structure. I had no idea what was gonna come on in terms of his pacing. I said to myself, I hope he doesn't fight my pacing. I hope he doesn't, I hope he – I felt it was Beckett's pacing. I felt it was my pacing also at the same time it wasn't my pacing; it was faster.<sup>1160</sup>

In the New York production David Warrilow, the actor who played 'Words,' used a rubato-rhythm to adapt the text to the musical structures. He sings the full text 'Age is when to a man' in No. 5 and 6 without accompaniment, although Feldman didn't include a pause at this point.

If Beckett had indicated that the whole melody should be played by Music alone and Words would only join in during the repetition, Feldman does not take up the repetition, but sets individual scales within a continual process between repeat signs. In this way, Feldman made sure that the intro for Words, who must start his text at the moment when the melody is repeated, has been left undetermined and such a way that the text could be timed together with the musical structure. As Claren argues, in the same way Feldman transposes the series in which the scales are ordered for the studying of the song 'Age is when to a man' (Nos. 16-24, see above) in the final rendition (No. 24), where he uses the contributions of music for 'Then down

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<sup>1160</sup> Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman Says, op. cit.*, p. 236

a little way.’ This includes a scale which begins on d  $\sharp 1$  (Nos. 30-31) as well as the three-note motif of the flutes. Their accompaniment is transformed into a  $\flat 1$ -g1-f1 (No. 32), while he simply uses the diatonic scale as an upbeat to the complete song (No. 33) and has the text sung against the minor sevenths (shifted against one another) of the first flute.

12.

31

FL. 1

FL. 2

VIB.

PF.

VN.

VLA.

VC.

32

FL. 1

FL. 2

VIB.

PF.

VN.

VLA.

VC.

33

FL. 1

FL. 2

VIB.

PF.

VN.

VLA.

VC.

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Figure 26: Morton Feldman, *Words and Music*, (Nos. 31-33), p. 12

In several instances, Feldman ignores the directions of Beckett, for example when he doesn't repeat the "Here I am" [adsum] but varies it in nr. 4-7 and later on completely changes it (No. 11) and when during the studying of the song 'Age is when to a man' Music's suggestions (nr. 19) is

not repeated, but developed (No. 20) and then, as indicated, only the end of the last suggestion is repeated (which has now two parts) (No. 21); immediately after he follows up with a new scale instead of improving the last suggestion as Beckett indicates (No. 22). In this way, Feldman's music runs its own course; while following Beckett's directions *in se* very conscientiously, the distance from Beckett's text has been increased by the non-chronological way in which Feldman has inserted them into the radioplay. As Feldman explains, 'I started at the end, I started in different places,' since 'the whole idea of beginning, middle and end which was very apparent would not help as an emotional structure.'<sup>1161</sup> In this sense, Feldman started at the end, which means that the minor sevenths of the beginning are not the start of the *compositional* process, but the sevenths of already used themes of the first section. The last section then has the *reverse* function of an overture, since it was composed first, but played in last instance; traditionally overtures are composed last and played first.

Because of this underlying distance between text and music, which does not cause any overt conflict, and also because of the departure from Beckett's directions and the avoidance of musical clichés the characters 'Age,' 'Love' and 'The Face' in Beckett's text are presented *allegorically*, which in Feldman's eyes expresses music's 'remoteness, its unattainableness.' He specifically distances his work here from the compositional praxis of Richard Wagner:

It's not Wagnerian in terms of layering of the word into the structure and the body of music. It's more distant. It's going along. I wanted its presence and its remoteness, its unattainableness. An unattainableness and yet a marvelous presence which is music.<sup>1162</sup>

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<sup>1161</sup> Morton Feldman, *op. cit.*, p. 236

<sup>1162</sup> *Ibid.*

He concludes that ‘the closer you get, the more tragic it becomes, and the more compelling it becomes.’<sup>1163</sup> So, rather than presenting the bond between words and music as a *fait accompli*, or a given, Feldman reads Beckett’s text as a musical *un-nameable*, to paraphrase Beckett. As I have argued above, music’s unattainableness is highlighted by Feldman’s insistence on the fact that he refuses to name anything (or in another formulation, “I don’t try to articulate what I am looking for”). For every *naming* is already a possessing by means of a (reifying) concept.

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<sup>1163</sup> Ibid.



## **CHAPTER 7: Iannis Xenakis's Music in Light of his Philosophy of Space and Time**





## Introduction

‘It is not the ear, but the intelligence that hears.’<sup>1164</sup>

‘One beauty of the mathematical form was its fluid development into a three-dimensional volume from a two-dimensional shape, thereby implying a movement or unfolding over time.’<sup>1165</sup>

This chapter is concerned with the conception of musical time and space in the work of Iannis Xenakis, both from a theoretical and compositional-practical point of view. Xenakis had a dual concept of time, on the one hand the static, virtual ‘outside-time’ of modelling duration, and on the other hand the ‘in-time’ – time unfolding in the composition itself, both in the score and as performed. Another important element in his conceptualisation of these domains, is his treatment of sound, as material – shaped according to theoretical considerations, designed graphically, given structure and form in novel ways, and borrowed within his own oeuvre.<sup>1166</sup> Especially the concept of *montage* – as adopted by Xenakis – is of interest, yielding a new insight into the relation between theory and compositional praxis, and challenging the view of the mathematical over-determination of his music. Although he was very much informed by scientific methods, Xenakis argued that it is *experience* which ‘makes or breaks theories’, not eternal criteria or objective laws, governing art’s truth or validity.<sup>1167</sup> He states that neither the

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<sup>1164</sup> ‘L’oreille n’entend pas, c’est l’intelligence qui entend.’ Iannis Xenakis, as cited by Helena Maria Da Silva Santana, *L’Orchestration chez Iannis Xenakis: l’espace et le rythme, fonctions du timbre*, Ph.D. Thesis (Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV), 1998), (reprinted, Paris, Septentrion, 2003)

<sup>1165</sup> Marc Treib, *Space calculated in Seconds: The Philips Pavilion*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 235. Cited by Sven Sterken, ‘À la recherche de l’espace paramétrisé. Les surfaces réglées comme thème dans l’œuvre de Iannis Xenakis,’ in Makis Solomos, *Présences de Iannis Xenakis*, (Paris, CDMC, 2001), p. 217

<sup>1166</sup> The aspect of this borrowing has been studied in depth by Benoît Gibson, *The instrumental music of Iannis Xenakis: theory, practice, self-borrowing*, (Hillsdale, N.Y., Pendragon Press, 2011)

<sup>1167</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Arts/Sciences.Alloys*, (Hillsdale, N.Y., Pendragon, 1985), p. 4-5

inference/deductive or the experimental 'modes' govern art – art 'lives' in a third mode, of 'immediate revelation.'<sup>1168</sup>

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<sup>1168</sup> Ibid.

### Theoretical and philosophical issues in Xenakis's work

In this section, an overview of Xenakis's compositional technique is presented, from the point of view of the time/space continuity, as set out in three theoretical works: the chapter 'Concerning Space, Time and Music,' from *Musique formelles (Formalized Music)*; and *Musique. Architecture* and 'Sur le temps' ('On Time') from *Kéleütha*. In these texts, Xenakis presents an overview of his ideas and theories as he had developed over a number of years, with roots in ancient Greek philosophy, as well as historical and contemporary mathematics, and illustrations from his own oeuvre. This is generally considered to be both a major contribution to the history of musical composition and presents a unique insight into Xenakis's aesthetics. Although often seen as extremely complex, authors such as MiHu Iliescu,<sup>1169</sup> Makis Solomos,<sup>1170</sup> Benoît Gibson,<sup>1171</sup> Helena Maria Da Silva Santana<sup>1172</sup> and Boris Hoffmann,<sup>1173</sup> amongst others, have analyzed and commented upon this theoretical work, as well placing it in the larger context of both his oeuvre and the study of musical form and formalization. On the one hand, it presents an image of a carefully reasoned approach to the praxis of composition, by highlighting that which all compositional strategies share, whilst on the other hand, this oeuvre always implies a need for an

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<sup>1169</sup> MiHu Iliescu, *Musical et extramusical: éléments de pensée spatiale dans l'oeuvre de Iannis Xenakis*, Doctoral Thesis (Université de Lille III, 1996)

<sup>1170</sup> Makis Solomos cannot sufficiently be referenced here, as his research on Xenakis is arguably unrivalled in both the number of aspects of Xenakis's oeuvre he has covered, as well as the depth of his insight. See my bibliography for more information.

<sup>1171</sup> Benoît Gibson, *The Instrumental Music of Iannis Xenakis. Theory, Practice, Self-Borrowing*, (Sharon Kanach (ed.), Iannis Xenakis Series), (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2011)

<sup>1172</sup> Helena Maria Da Silva Santana, *L'Orchestration chez Iannis Xenakis: l'espace et le rythme, fonctions du timbre*, Ph.D. Thesis (Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV), 1998), (reprinted, Paris, Septentrion, 2003)

<sup>1173</sup> Boris Hoffmann, 'Aspects spatiaux dans les œuvres instrumentales de Xenakis,' in Anastasia Georgaki, and Makis Solomos (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Symposium Iannis Xenakis*, (Athens, University of Athens, 2005), pp. 192-201 and 'Exploring the Sound Tapestry – The Role of Space in Nomos Gamma,' in Dimitri Exarchos (ed.), *Proceedings of the Xenakis International Symposium*, London 1-3 April 2011

intuitive and practical use of the musical ear. Referring to the opening quotation, the ear's 'hearing' is mediated by the mind. The following overview is therefore crucial in understanding the basic concepts in Xenakis's compositional technique and philosophy.

In *Vers une métamusique*,<sup>1174</sup> Xenakis explains his view on the history of music from a mathematical and logical systematic point of view. From the start, he takes a critical view of two opposing tendencies in contemporary music: on the one hand he criticizes the blind follower of information technology, which preaches a *communication* model of music, with composers as transmitters and audiences as receptors. At the other end of the spectrum, he distinguishes the *intuitionists*, composers who follow two trends:

- (i) 'graphists' who posit the graphic *symbol* above music and sound and fetishize this. They ignore the fact that graphic writing is symbolic (as in traditional *sofège*), geometric or numerical, and is an *image*, *faithful* as much as possible to the instructions transmitted by the composer to the orchestra or the machine.
- (ii) Composers who add theatrical, extramusical actions accompanying the musical performance. These are influenced by the 'happenings' and express the disarray of certain artists, seeking refuge in gestures and disparate events, which betray their confidence in absolute music.

For Xenakis, both groups have a romantic attitude in common. They believe in immediate action and are much less worried about the control offered by thought. Reflection then is needed for musical action to occur. He continues by stating that a 'correct middle' means a compromise; on the contrary, he proposes critical thinking. He argues that a focus on action, reflection and the

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<sup>1174</sup> Iannis Xenakis, 'Vers une métamusique,' in *La Nef*, No. 29, (1967); Reprinted in *Musique. Architecture*, (Tournai, Casterman, 1971), pp. 38-70. I will be referring to the version in *Musique. Architecture*.

self-transformation of the sounds alone is needed. For music, scientific and mathematical thinking should be amalgamated dialectically with intuition.<sup>1175</sup>

Xenakis explains that traditional linear musical thinking is subsumed as a special case within his more general theory of stochastics. He proposes a theory which uses logic, abstract constructions<sup>1176</sup> and which can be both valid in *time* (for what he calls ‘transversal musicology’<sup>1177</sup>) and in *space* (as ‘comparative musicology’<sup>1178</sup>). In order to achieve this practically, he proposes a musical architecture which is qualified by and governed according to three categories: firstly, the category of *outside-time*, secondly, the category of *in-time* and finally the temporal category. The first includes ‘durations and constructions (relations and operations) relating to the elements (points, distances, functions, etc.) belonging to and which can express themselves on the time axis.’<sup>1179</sup> Another example of the first is the musical scale; the musical event in which it occurs is considered to belong to the temporal category; ‘the temporal thus being reserved for instant creation.’<sup>1180</sup> Thirdly, a melody or chord on a given scale relates the category of *outside-time* with the temporal. They put *outside-time* constructions in the *in-time*.

Xenakis continues with an analysis of Byzantine modes, and argues that the tonal system is reductive in that it insists upon the temporal category defining the *in-time* hierarchies of its

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<sup>1175</sup> Iannis Xenakis, ‘Intuition ou rationalisme dans les techniques compositionnelles de la musique contemporaine, / Intuition oder Rationalismus in der Kompositionstechnik der zeitgenössischen Musik / Intuition or Rationalism in the Techniques of Contemporary Musical Composition,’ in *Künstler in Berlin: Berlin Confrontation*, (Berlin, Ford Foundation Berlin / Presse- und Informationsamt des Landes Berlin, 1965), pp. 15-18

<sup>1176</sup> *Vers une métamusique*, op. cit., p. 42

<sup>1177</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>1178</sup> *ibid.* p. 42

<sup>1179</sup> ‘Dans la catégorie hors-temps sont incluses les durées et les constructions (relations et operations) qui ont trait aux elements (points, distances, fonctions, etc.) qui appartiennent à et qui peuvent s’exprimer sur l’axe du temps.’ In *Vers une philosophie de la musique*, op. cit., p. 81

<sup>1180</sup> ‘Le temporel étant donc réservé à la creation instantanée.’ *Vers une philosophie*, op. cit., p. 81

harmonic functions. In terms of *outside-time*, he avers that the idea of the scale reduces the harmonic richness of the modal system to a single octave scale (with ‘two tonics, a and c’).<sup>1181</sup> This leads Xenakis to plead for a reintroduction of outside-time structures of greater interest than the current musical system.

His philosophy of music traces its steps to the pre-Christian era of Greek antiquity, of thinkers such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato and Heraclites. Rather than an *iconoclast*, Xenakis considered himself as an outsider, according to Miha Iliescu.<sup>1182</sup> His work presents an alternative to traditional musical thinking, even in terms of the musical avant-garde music of Boulez or Stockhausen. Xenakis mentions Varèse’s work, whose aesthetics he largely shared<sup>1183</sup>: Xenakis’s approach can thus be seen as a reflection on space and time.<sup>1184</sup> Iliescu claims that for Xenakis the musical is borne from a spatial imagination and is contained within a space, in the same way the *in-time* is contained in the *outside-time*. Xenakis’s treatment of time and space in music is, however, complex. In this regard, Xenakis himself wonders in his essay ‘Sur le temps’: ‘Is time not simply a notion – epiphenomenon of a deeper reality?’<sup>1185</sup> For him, space is a more substantial phenomenon, ‘freed from the guardianship of time.’<sup>1186</sup>

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<sup>1181</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>1182</sup> Miha Iliescu, *Musical et extramusical: Éléments de pensée spatiale dans l'œuvre de Iannis Xenakis*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Paris I, 1996, p. 4: ‘À défaut d’une filiation musicale – Xenakis nie même celle de Varèse, dont il partage pourtant largement l’esthétique – il n’est peut-être pas déplacé d’interpréter sa démarche comme étant issue d’une réflexion sur l’espace et sur le temps.’

<sup>1183</sup> Makis Solomos, ‘Xenakis-Varèse et la question de la filiation,’ in Timothée Horodyski, and Philippe Lalitte (ed.), *Edgar Varèse. Du son organisé aux arts audio*, (Paris, L’Harmattan, 2008), pp. 139-170

<sup>1184</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>1185</sup> Iannis Xenakis, ‘Sur le temps,’ in A. Galliari (ed.), *Kéleütha. Écrits*, preface and notes by Benoît Gibson, (Paris, L’Arche, 1994), p. 94 ‘Le temps n’est-il pas simplement une notion – épiphénomène d’une réalité plus profonde?’

<sup>1186</sup> Xenakis, ‘Sur le temps,’ p. 96 : ‘[...]affranchi de la tutelle du temps.’

In order to further elucidate Xenakis's position, I now turn to a discussion of the chapter 'Concerning Space, Time and Music' from *Formalized Music*,<sup>1187</sup> in which Iannis Xenakis outlines a theory of musical time, based on scientific theories. However, this theory is itself not a scientific theory, but aims to establish an aesthetics of time and space, as understood from the position of the composer. He precisely opens with the question:

WHAT IS A COMPOSER? - A thinker and plastic artist who expresses himself through sound beings.  
These two realms probably cover his entire being.

Already, it is clear from this definition that Xenakis attempts to carve out a position for the composer in radically different terms to traditional ones, however, at the same time it implies that aspect of the role of a composer which is connected to earlier, historical, philosophical and musical referents. As he explains here and elsewhere, these include Greek thinkers (in particular Parmenides, Pythagoras and Heraclites) and modern physicists (such as Boltzmann,<sup>1188</sup> Lorentz and Fitzgerald<sup>1189</sup> and Einstein); at a music-historical level, and although he rejected this affiliation, the influence of Edgard Varèse will become more apparent at the start of the first 'point.' Indeed, Xenakis proposes here a number of these points, relating scientific insights to a musical aesthetics of his own: firstly, the notion of a stochastic music; secondly, a theory of the macroscopic level of composition, based on the work of Lorentz and Fitzgerald, and Einstein.

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<sup>1187</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized music : thought and mathematics in composition*, (Bloomington ; London, Indiana University Press, 1971)

<sup>1188</sup> Ludwig Eduard Boltzmann (1844–1906); See Stephen G. Brush, 'Boltzmann,' in Charles Coulston Gillispie (ed.), *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, (New York, Scribner, 1970) and William R. Everdell, 'The Problem of Continuity and the Origins of Modernism: 1870–1913,' in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 9, No. 5, (1988), pp. 531–552

<sup>1189</sup> Hendrik Antoon Lorentz (1853–1928), the Dutch physicist, and George Francis FitzGerald (1851–1901), the Irish philosopher of natural and experimental philosophy. They are known together for the formulation of the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction, which formed an integral part of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity.

Thirdly, a critique of construction in music, with a proposal for a new theory of musical composition ('new laws' and rules).

Xenakis opens his argument by stating that in 1954, he introduced 'probability theory and calculus in musical composition in order to control sound masses both in their invention and in their evolution,' which 'inaugurated an entirely new path in music, more global than polyphony, serialism or, in general, "discrete" music. From hence came stochastic music.'<sup>1190</sup> The idea of sound masses refers, as I have shown in Chapter 5, to the terminology proposed and used by Edgard Varèse. However, Xenakis adapts it to his reading of some of the classics of physics. In particular, he founds this stochastic theory of music in the 'notion of entropy, as formulated by Boltzmann or Shannon.'<sup>1191</sup> In an attempt to further define, or at least describe his or her role, Xenakis compares the composer to a god, who 'may create the reversibility of the phenomena of masses, and apparently, invert Eddington's'<sup>1192</sup> "arrow of time."<sup>1193</sup> He explains that he applies probability distributions both in computer generated sound synthesis on a micro- or macroscopic scale, and in instrumental compositions. It is at this point in his interpretation of physics and the sciences that he makes explicit their interaction, a crucial philosophical point,

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<sup>1190</sup> Xenakis, *Formalized Music Thought and Mathematics in Composition*, *op. cit.*, p. 255

<sup>1191</sup> Xenakis refers to the American engineer, mathematician and cryptographer Claude Elwood Shannon (1916–2001) who was instrumental in establishing information theory. He cites Claude E. Shannon and W. Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1949); see also Erico Marui Guizzo, 'The Essential Message: Claude Shannon and the Making of Information Theory,' (M.S. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dept. of Humanities, Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies, 2003)

<sup>1192</sup> Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington (1882-1944), the British astronomer, physicist, and mathematician. See Arthur S. Eddington, *Space, Time and Gravitation: An Outline of the General Relativity Theory*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920) and Charles de Koninck, 'The Philosophy of Sir Arthur Eddington and the Problem of Indeterminism,' in *The Writings of Charles de Koninck*, (Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2008)

<sup>1193</sup> Peter Coveney, and Roger Highfield, *The Arrow of Time: A voyage through science to solve time's greatest mystery*, (London, W.H. Allen, 1990). The arrow of time is a concept developed by Eddington in 1927, which states the one-way direction and asymmetry of time.



‘[...] the laws of probability that I use are often nested and vary with time which creates a stochastic dynamics which is aesthetically interesting.’<sup>1194</sup> It is the latter part of this phrase which illuminates Xenakis’s aesthetic position – whilst conscious of the physics of time and space as formulated by these scientists, mathematicians, (astro)physicists and engineers, it is their implication for musical temporality, as it is considered from the perspective of *outside-time*, *inside-time* and temporal unfolding. The relation extends into the (analytic) procedures of mathematicians such as Liouville’s<sup>1195</sup> and Ilya Prigogine<sup>1196</sup> from which he concludes that it ‘implies the irreversibility of the system to the equilibrium state; that is, it implies the irreversibility of time.’<sup>1197</sup> It is this focus on the one-directional flow of time which occupies a central position in Xenakis’s theory of musical time.

A second point in this chapter on space, time and music, is concerned with the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction and Einstein’s theory of relativity, relating them to formations in the macroscopic composition of music. In relation to these theories, Xenakis states that it is well-known that their equations link space and time, based on the finite velocity of light, and that ‘from this it follows that time is not absolute.’<sup>1198</sup> He continues with a gloss on the relativity of time:

Yet time is always there. It “takes time” to go from one point to another in space, even if that time depends on moving reference frames relative to the observer. There is no instantaneous jump from

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<sup>1194</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 256

<sup>1195</sup> Joseph Liouville (1809-1882) was a French mathematician, who proposed a theorem used in complex analysis. See Benjamin Fine and Gerhard Rosenberger, *The Fundamental Theorem of Algebra* (Springer Science & Business Media, 1997)

<sup>1196</sup> Xenakis cites Ilya Prigogine, *Physique Temps et Devenir*, (Paris, Masson, 1982)

<sup>1197</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, p. 256

<sup>1198</sup> *Ibid.*

one point to another in space, much less “spatial ubiquity”—that is, simultaneous presence of an event or an object in two sites in space.<sup>1199</sup>

This particular comment implies *in nuce* a reference to Xenakis’s own compositional ideal of continuity (*per* the glissando) and the diachronicity of musical beings. In other words, the theory of relativity functions as a theoretical framework for an aesthetics of compositional technique, grounding some of Xenakis’s procedures. This theory, however, is not entirely one-sided. Xenakis continues by positing (again in scientific terms) the opposite term, the notion of displacement:

Within a local reference frame, what then does displacement signify? If the notion of displacement were more fundamental than that of time, one could undoubtedly reduce all macro and microcosmic transformations to extremely short chains of displacement. Consequently (and this is an hypothesis that I freely advance), if we were to adhere to quantum mechanics and its implications accepted now for decades, we would perhaps be forced to admit the notion of quantified space and its corollary, quantified time. But then, what could a quantified time and space signify, a time and space in which contiguity would be abolished? What would the pavement of the universe be if there were gaps between the paving stones, inaccessible and filled with nothing?<sup>1200</sup>

In the above quotation, it becomes even clearer how the idea of *contiguity*, ‘the state of bordering or being in direct contact with something’ a word with origins in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from the Latin *contiguitas*, itself from the Latin *contiguous* ‘touching’<sup>1201</sup> – is central to the understanding of Xenakis’s philosophy of music. In this case, Xenakis imagines the opposite idea, that space and

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<sup>1199</sup> Ibid., p. 256

<sup>1200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1201</sup> Judy Pearsall and Patrick Hanks (eds.), *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 396

time can be discontinuous, another key idea. It reverberates throughout his work, as several Xenakis scholars have pointed out.<sup>1202</sup>

In the next section, Xenakis considers the experiential dimension of time as *duration*. Here, he refers to the experimental demonstrations of the scientists C. N. Yang and T. D. Lee,<sup>1203</sup> where he draws the attention to symmetries at the particle level, where a certain theorem (CPT)

still holds for the symmetries of the electron (C) and of time (T), symmetries that have not yet been completely annulled. This remains so even if the “arrow of time” appears to be non-reversible in certain weak interactions of particles. [...] Let us also not forget the theory of retrograde time found in Plato's *Politicos*—or in the future contraction of the universe. Extraordinary visions!<sup>1204</sup>

In other words, Xenakis is looking to overcome the traditional theories of time which hold the view that time is absolutely irreversible – at least there is a certain desire for physics to discover the possibility of reversible time. In fact, he describes the basics of quantum physics, by pointing to its specificity, and the importance of observation in the determination of the state of a photon as either corpuscular or a wave. It is, however, the interpretation Xenakis gives this theoretical consideration of physics which is crucial:

These explanations hint at the idea of an “intervention of the present into the past,” contrary to the fact that causality in quantum mechanics cannot be inverted. For, if the conditions of observation are established to detect the particle, then one obtains the corpuscular state and never the wave state, and

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<sup>1202</sup> For example, the work of Miha Iliescu, cited above, focuses on these opposites, continuity/discontinuity. See Miha Iliescu, *Musical et extramusical: Éléments de pensée spatiale dans l'oeuvre de Iannis Xenakis*, (Doctoral Thesis, University of Paris I, 1996)

<sup>1203</sup> Xenakis refers here to the theorem named after the Chinese-born American physicists T. D. Lee (°1926) and C. N. Yang (°1922) in statistical mechanics; See Lee, T. D.; Yang, C. N. ‘Statistical Theory of Equations of State and Phase Transitions. II. Lattice Gas and Ising Model,’ in *Physical Review*, Vol. 87 (1952), pp. 410–419

<sup>1204</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, p. 257

vice versa. A similar discussion on non-temporality and the irreversibility of the notion of causality was undertaken some time ago by Hans Reichenbach.<sup>1205</sup>

In other words, Xenakis seems to hold the view that, although causality cannot be inverted, a relationship between particles could potentially be seen in relation to one another which upends the absolutes of strict quantum-mechanical view. It is this idea of a sympathetic relation between particles (and I would go as far as to propose that Xenakis is referring other sorts of elements, even in a musical sense as tones or sound beings). In that sense, Xenakis explicitly refers to a *temporal* relation between particles, which is conducive to his theory of music; I would term this as the *historical* in his theory. In the following part of this text, Xenakis attempts to establish another characteristic of the relation between particles, in this case a *spatial* one:

Another fundamental experiment has to do with the correlation of the movement of two photons emitted in opposite directions by a single atom. How can one explain that both either pass through two polarizing films, or that both are blocked? It is as if each photon “knew” what the other was doing and instantaneously so, which is contrary to the special theory of relativity.<sup>1206</sup>

At this point, Xenakis concludes with an aesthetic statement of intent:

Now, this experiment, could be a starting point for the investigation of more deeply seated properties of space, *freed from the tutelage of time*. In this case, could the “nonlocality” of quantum mechanics perhaps be explained not by the hypothesis of “hidden variables” in which time still intervenes, but rather by the unsuspected and extravagant properties of nontemporal space, such as “spatial ubiquity,” for example? [...] In fact, let us consider the movement of a photon. Movement means displacement. Now, could this displacement be considered an autogenesis of the photon by itself at each step of its trajectory (continuous or quantized)? This continuous auto-creation of the photon, could it not, in fact, be space?

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<sup>1205</sup> Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, op. cit., p. 257

<sup>1206</sup> Ibid.

Xenakis is not only concerned with the relationship between particles, elements, structures, but also to the creation of them, in other words their *emergence*. It is highly interesting how he conceived of this in aesthetic terms in the third part of this part of *Formalized Music*. He approaches this from the point of view of the composer (which he established at the beginning of this text). If considering the question of how to create something from nothing,

In musical composition, construction must stem from originality which can be defined in extreme (perhaps inhuman) cases as the creation of new rules or laws, as far as that is possible; as far as possible meaning original, not yet known or even foreseeable. Construct laws therefore from nothing, since without any causality.<sup>1207</sup>

Although the ‘original’ in Xenakis is a complex issue in itself, it could be seen here to be present at a number of levels: this implies a theory of not simply individual particles or musical elements, but one which constructs a framework for a certain interrelation (even correlation) between these elements. Xenakis immediately sees a problem with this *original* creation. It would require a complex number of rules:

But a construction from nothing, therefore totally engendered, totally original, would necessarily call upon an infinite mass of rules duly entangled. Such a mass would have to cover the laws of a universe different from our own. For example: rules for a tonal composition have been constructed. Such a composition therefore includes, a priori, the “tonal functions.”<sup>1208</sup>

The *historical* element in this theory, which stresses the spatial, entails a further elaboration in musical terms. The link with the sound-beings or ‘entities’ etc., are grounded both in reality (as acoustic sounds) and in the virtual, the realm of abstraction.

It also includes a combinatory conception since it acts on entities, sounds, as defined by the instruments. In order to go beyond this slight degree of originality, other functions would have to be invented, or no functions should exist at all. *One is therefore obliged to conceive of forms from thoughts bearing no*

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<sup>1207</sup> Ibid, p. 258

<sup>1208</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *op. cit.*, p. 259

*relation to the proceeding ones*,<sup>1209</sup> thoughts without limits of shapes and without end. Here, we are obliged to progressively weave an unlimited web of entangled rules—and that alone in the combinatory realm which itself excludes, by definition, any possible continuums of sound.<sup>1210</sup>

A dialectic exists between these two poles: on the one hand Xenakis proposes a theory which, whilst taking into account the sonorous, i.e. instrumental sounds; on the other hand he avers that the notion of the continuum is to be found not in this world of sound, but in the web of rules. He argues that technology in the form of computers could contribute to the material realization of this theory; however, this technology is limited in philosophical terms as a mere epiphenomenon of thought. In this sense, he reverses the Bergsonian notion of rationalized consciousness to an almost superhuman level of control over the tools at the disposal of, in this case, the composer:

However, the insertion of continuity will consequently augment the spread of this web and its compacity. Furthermore, if one cared to engender the unengenderable in the realm of sound, then it would be necessary to provide rules other than those for sound machines such as pipes, strings, skins, etc. which is possible today thanks to computers and corresponding technologies. *But technology is both but a semblance of thought and its materialisation.*<sup>1211</sup> It is therefore but an epiphenomenon in this discussion. Actually, rules of sound synthesis such as those stemming from Fourier series should not be used any more as the basis of construction. Others, different ones, must be formulated.<sup>1212</sup>

Rather than accept the scientific as the basis of a theory of music, Xenakis clearly argues for a theory of music which, whilst taking into account the world as it is seen by physicists, musical composition must create a set of rules of its own. The dialectic of rationality and the imagination

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<sup>1209</sup> My stress

<sup>1210</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 259

<sup>1211</sup> My stress

<sup>1212</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, p. 258

(in Xenakis's terms that which is original) ought to lead to a set of rules which is not simply a composer's *individual* toolbox. It implies a shared musical material (to paraphrase Adorno):

Another perspective: We have seen how construction stems from an originality which is defined by the creation of rules and laws outside of an individual's or even the human species' memory.<sup>1213</sup>

It is only here that Xenakis defines what he understands as a rule or a law:

A rule or law signifies a finite or infinite procedure, always the same, applied to continuous or "discrete" elements. This definition implies the notion of repetition, of recurrence in time, or symmetry in realms outside time (*hors temps*). Therefore, in order for a rule to exist, it must be applicable several times in eternity's space and time. If a rule were to exist but once, it would be swallowed up in this immensity and reduced to a single point, therefore unobservable. In order for it to be observable, it must be repeatable an infinite number of times.<sup>1214</sup>

The crucial element in this definition is how Xenakis always ties in the definition to the temporal and spatial dimensions of reality. This grounds his thinking in a sense, not simply from a scientific point as I have shown, but from a philosophical one. In other words, Xenakis avoids theoretical speculation for the sake of speculation.

In a final section, Xenakis turns to the idea of repetition. He once more refers to the well-known Greek thinkers:

Can one repeat a phenomenon? (cf. Heraclites: "It is impossible to step twice into the same river," and Kratylos: "not even once.")

But the fact remains that the universe:

- a) seems, for the time being, to be made up of rules-procedures;
- b) that these rules-procedures are recurrent

A further element of this dialectic is implied here: the static of Parmenidian Being versus the Heraclitian idea of the ever-changing nature of Being:

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<sup>1213</sup> Ibid., p. 259

<sup>1214</sup> Ibid.

It is as though the Being (in disagreement with Parmenides), in order to continue existing, is obliged to die; and once dead, is obliged to start his cycle again. Existence, therefore, is a dotted line.<sup>1215</sup>

This leads Xenakis to seek a minimal form of emergence :

Can one, at last, imagine an infinitesimal microscopic rule that is engendered from nothing? Even if physics has yet to discover anything resembling this, despite “Lamb's shift” (which sees each point in space in our universe as seething in virtual pairs of particles and anti-particles), we can imagine such an eventuality which would, by the way, be of the same nature as the fact or pure chance, detached from any causality.<sup>1216</sup>

This anti-causal thinking would allow for an expansion of the virtual, and ultimately, a change in the way composition can be effected; in other words, Xenakis finds common cause with the scientific world, but from a radically *artistic* perspective:

It is necessary to depend on such a conclusion of a Universe open to the unprecedented which relentlessly would be formed or would disappear in a truly creative whirlwind, beginning from nothingness and disappearing into nothing. The same goes for the basis of art as well as for man's destiny.<sup>1217</sup>

This philosophy is obviously best served not by a simple form of technological rationality, but through a creative process which is based in the original, and a continued striving for renewal, both artistic and political.

### **Musique/Architecture: a philosophy of (dis)continuity**

From his propositions, Iliescu concludes that the concept of musical space corresponds to the different identities of their author: Xenakis as musician, architect, mathematician, engineer,

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<sup>1215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1217</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music, op. cit.*, p. 259



theorist of physics and metaphysics, philosopher and [resistance] fighter.<sup>1218</sup> This concept therefore contains ambiguities and contradictions. For example, Xenakis affirms the primacy of an abstract space, purely psychological, of which music and architecture would be incarnations and in a way equivalent; this theory coexists with Xenakis's preoccupation with a concrete space and with a concrete sound material, to be treated in the manner of an artisan.<sup>1219</sup> Iliescu sums up this antagonistic relation of spatialization and temporal unfolding as follows:

Xenakis's attempt to spatialize time and thus to conceive its reversibility, which links back to Parmenidian [static] ontology, does not exclude the recognition, in a Heraclitian [dynamic] spirit, of the objective existence of a irreversible temporal flux.<sup>1220</sup>

A parallel exists for Xenakis, then, between a morphology of sound and a visual morphology, based in his understanding of the contemporaneity of Greek philosophy. This means that he draws on a number of philosophers, as mentioned above. On the one hand, the 'Pythagorean-Parmenidian field,' which he sees as an indication for a road towards the reconstruction, as much as possible *ex nihilo*, of the basics of musical composition.<sup>1221</sup> As Iliescu writes,<sup>1222</sup> Xenakis's 'formalized musics' [*musiques formelles*] inscribes itself in this philosophical tradition, which attempts to reduce the diversity of the physical world to a purely logical level. However, Xenakis interprets this in a double fashion, as on the one hand consisting of 'the so-called idealist way of thinking'<sup>1223</sup>, and on the other hand 'as the first absolute and total materialism.'<sup>1224</sup> Iliescu calls

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<sup>1218</sup> Miha Iliescu, *Musical et extramusical*, *op. cit.*, p. 6

<sup>1219</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>1220</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6: 'l'effort xenakien de spatialiser le temps et de concevoir ainsi sa réversibilité, effort qui renvoie à l'ontologie parméniennne, n'exclut pas la reconnaissance, dans un esprit héraclitéen, de l'existence objective d'un flux temporel irréversible.'

<sup>1221</sup> See *Vers une philosophie de la musique*, in *Musique/Architecture*, p. 71-92

<sup>1222</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35

<sup>1223</sup> *ibid.* p. 35. Xenakis, 'Conférence de Varsovie', p. 61: 'la soi-disant voie idéaliste de pensée'

this position an ‘ontology of sound.’<sup>1225</sup> According to the musicologist Fred Goldbeck, Xenakis’s composition *Eonta* is a ‘*pronunciamento* in favour of a *music-as-sound* which *is* in opposition to a *music-as-motif* which is developmental.’<sup>1226</sup> As the scholar Makis Solomos explains, it is therefore no longer a question of a “‘being” [*être*] which is identified with a note and concretized in terms of “being” [*étant*] by the unimportant choice of a timbre.’<sup>1227</sup> Xenakis himself speaks in this regard of ‘sound being’ [*être sonore*].<sup>1228</sup> In *Musique architecture*, for example, he asks if you ‘can construct sonorous beings gifted with discontinuity or a maximum of continuity. The answer is yes.’<sup>1229</sup> As I will argue shortly, Xenakis gives an example of this crossover between architecture and music: his *Metastaseis* (1953-1954 and created in 1955) for orchestra served as an inspiration for the design of the Philips Pavilion at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels, a collaborative project with Le Corbusier and Edgard Varèse. Particularly the idea of the continuous line, represented in the buildings structural elements, found its musical equivalent in the glissando.

### **Parmenides’s concept of being and Xenakis’s notion of the sound being**

In this regard, Ilescu distinguishes three characteristics of the Parmenidian *being* which Xenakis used: intemporality, contiguity and immobility.<sup>1230</sup> The first excludes any notion of past, present or future, and rests fully in the Now, whilst also finding an equivalence between a Parmenidian *being* and the category *outside-time*. He also imagines Xenakis’ ‘sound beings’ as possessing

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<sup>1224</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35. Xenakis, *Musique/ Architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 74: ‘le premier matérialisme absolu et total’

<sup>1225</sup> Mihai Ilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 7

<sup>1226</sup> Fred Goldbeck, p. 169 as cited by Mihai Ilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>1227</sup> Makis Solomos, 1993, p. 448

<sup>1228</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, *op. cit.*, p. 28; *Musiques architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 21 and 36

<sup>1229</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 21: ‘Peut-on construire des êtres sonores doués de discontinuité ou de continuité maximum? La réponse est oui.’

<sup>1230</sup> Ilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 37- 39

Characteristics which are not temporal and which can be ordered, given the structure of a group and which consequently can form a vectored space.<sup>1231</sup>

Xenakis uses the example of the melodic interval as independent from time – a fifth is always a fifth; the two notes can sound as a chord or as a melody. A sonorous being, then, has three irreducible characteristics: pitch, intensity, and duration and can moreover be considered as a logical function, in the sense of group theory or symbolic logic, as an ensemble of vectors.<sup>1232</sup> He considers a musical composition from three angles: firstly, as fundamental relations and operations independent of time (which he terms *logical* or *algebraic* structure *outside-time*); a second temporal point of view shows sound beings on the time axis, as durations which form a group with a given structure. This group is structured by using *temporal algebra* independent of the *outside-time algebra*. The third way of analyzing a composition could consider its *outside-time algebra* and its temporal algebra. This would then lead to a third fundamental structure – the *algebraic structure in-time*.<sup>1233</sup>

As Le Corbusier's assistant, Iannis Xenakis collaborated on the project to build the Philips Pavilion<sup>1234</sup> for the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels; not only did he design the building, based on a very simple sketch from Le Corbusier. As the architect and scholar Sven Sterken pointed out in his essay on Xenakis's architectural work<sup>1235</sup> – an implicit critique of an essay by Robert

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<sup>1231</sup> Xenakis, *Musique architecture*, p. 36. Also cited by Iliescu, op. cit., p. 37

<sup>1232</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36

<sup>1233</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36-37

<sup>1234</sup> Bart Lootsma, 'Een ode van Philips aan de vooruitgang,' in *Wonen TABK*, No. 2, (1984), p. 10-17; German translation in 'Poème électronique: Le Corbusier, Xenakis, Varèse,' in T.Kessler, A. Vowinkel (eds.), *Le Corbusier Synthèse des Arts, Aspekte des Spätwerks 1945-1965*, (Karlsruhe, Bad. Kunstverein, 1986), pp. 111-147; Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds - The Philips Pavilion, Le Corbusier, Edgard Varèse* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996);

<sup>1235</sup> Sven Sterken, 'À la recherche de l'espace paramétrisé. Les surfaces réglées comme thème dans l'œuvre de Iannis Xenakis,' in Makis Solomos, *Présences de Iannis Xenakis*, (Paris, CDMC, 2001), pp. 217-224; see also Sven Sterken,

Trevisiol<sup>1236</sup> – a number of aspects of Xenakis's conceptualizations of architectural technique were inspired by the constructivists of the 1920s and 1930s. This means that, like the architects Naum Gabo, Antoine Pevsner and Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, Xenakis is interested in finding the most rational form, and in following the second quotation at the top of this chapter, time was considered as a formal element of their architecture.<sup>1237</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to Le Corbusier, for whom he worked whilst designing the Philips Pavilion, this meant an integration of scientific and mathematical theories, as explained above. For Le Corbusier, the search for a rational architecture meant the search for a mathematical purity in terms of form, focussing on simple geometric shapes like the square and the rectangle. These, however, whilst becoming more complex in his later oeuvre, were leading to a justification of sorts in mathematical terms *a posteriori*. In other words, Le Corbusier legitimized his designs – translated in terms of proportions, numbers and geometric figures, ‘gaining the advantage of objectivity,’ and using them for their ‘symbolic meaning and not for their economic or structural value.’<sup>1238</sup> Xenakis, then, opposed this *instrumental* use of mathematics by asking ‘what is the geometric form which the *cover* needs to have for the quantity of material of which this cover is constituted to be minimal?’<sup>1239</sup> According to Xenakis, this question had inspired the ‘abstract and material research

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Iannis Xenakis, *ingénieur et architecte. Une analyse thématique de l'œuvre, suivie d'un inventaire critique de la collaboration avec Le Corbusier, des projets architecturaux et des installations réalisées dans le domaine du multimédia*, (PhD Thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 2004)

<sup>1236</sup> Trevisiol, Robert, ‘Le Pavillon Philips de Le Corbusier et Xenakis,’ in *Le Corbusier et Belgique*, (Paris; Brussels, FLC, 1997); <https://dipot.ulb.ac.be/dspace/bitstream/2013/86294/1/philips.doc> The passage of Sterken's essay on the Philips Pavilion is clearly related to the essay by Trevisiol, whom he cites once, as they both cite the same passages, from Le Corbusier's work, and subsequently from Xenakis's.

<sup>1237</sup> Sven Sterken, ‘À la recherche de l'espace paramétrisé,’ *op. cit.*, p. 217

<sup>1238</sup> Sven Sterken, *ibid.*, p. 218

<sup>1239</sup> Trevisiol quotes Xenakis, *Poème électronique*, p. 127: ‘Quelle est la forme géométrique que doit avoir la couverture pour que la quantité de matière qui constitue cette couverture soit minima [sic]?’ a different, non-attributed version of this same quote is to be found in Sterken, *op. cit.*, p. 219: ‘Quelle est la forme architecturale qui doit

of a generation of technicians and mathematicians.<sup>1240</sup> It was in this case reinforced concrete, whose ‘essence is continuity,’ which according to Xenakis allows for this new architecture.<sup>1241</sup> This ultimately led him to work with a minimum amount of material, particularly in the *Polytopes* series, which used light as an integral part of the construction.<sup>1242</sup> A certain contradiction, of using a minimum of materials, leads one theorist, Robert Trevisiol, to state that ‘for Xenakis, therefore, thickness, the constraints of the material must be reduced to a minimum, in order to interfere as little as possible with the perfection of the idea and the geometry. In the end, the materiality is a hindrance to perfection.’<sup>1243</sup> He goes on to claim that Le Corbusier’s art was one which accepted contrasts, ‘assemblages, with which the artist proceeds after a first selection, to introduce subsequently, with an empirical sensibility, a harmony which brings out the expressivity of the material.’<sup>1244</sup> On the other hand, Sterken impresses upon the notion of Xenakis’s main architectural innovation, namely the use of regulated surfaces,<sup>1245</sup> in which concrete elements, each different from every other, were put together to form a free and continuous surface. Following a logical (rather than a poetic) chain of thought Xenakis proposed an architecture, ‘which was imposed by this rigorous logic and which runs parallel with the

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être trouvée afin que la couverture soit réduite au minimum?»; the use of the term ‘cover’ is meant to differentiate it from the more traditional notion of the roof.

<sup>1240</sup> Xenakis in *Poème électronique*, p. 127: ‘C’est la question qui a façonné directement l’orientation des recherches abstraites et matérielles de techniciens et de mathématiciens depuis plus d’une génération.’

<sup>1241</sup> Ibid., p. 127 ‘Le béton armé, qui a l’origine avait copié l’ossature de bois ou de pierre, devait par son essence même servir de véhicule à ces préoccupations. Sa essence est la continuité.’

<sup>1242</sup> Ibid., p. 219. For example, the *Diatope* was an inflatable structure. The *Polytope de Montréal* was even more immaterial, as it consisted of a number of lights, suspended from wires.

<sup>1243</sup> ‘Pour Xenakis, donc, l’épaisseur, les contraintes de la matière doivent être réduites au minimum, pour interférer le moins possible avec la perfection de l’idée et de la géométrie. À la limite, la matérialité est une entrave à la perfection.’ In Trevisiol, *op. cit.*

<sup>1244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1245</sup> Peter Kolman, ‘Der Weg zur Flächenkomposition,’ in *Melos*, No. 37, (1970), pp. 8-12

technologically innovative character of this project.<sup>1246</sup> For Sterken, Xenakis ‘wants to minimise the personal aesthetic intuitions.’<sup>1247</sup> Instead of an *a posteriori* justification of form as he criticizes in Le Corbusier’s approach,<sup>1248</sup> Xenakis develops the Pavilion from the regulated surfaces up, to ‘master the free form’<sup>1249</sup> in this way. Xenakis’s architecture is not limited by the traditional concept of an architecture ‘of columns and beams,’ but has freed itself thanks to the new technology of the reinforced concrete. It is an architecture, ‘based on the geometry and the characteristics of the material.’<sup>1250</sup> In other words, the form is developed from the ground up, based in an interplay of the individual elements of the regulated surfaces (the concrete elements were fabricated off-site and then assembled *in situ*), which together formed the mathematical approximation of a continuous surface, without corners or straight lines. Xenakis himself argued this in his text ‘Le Pavillon Philips à l’aube d’une architecture,’<sup>1251</sup> where he criticizes traditional architecture: ‘Since antiquity, architecture is not a really spatial manifestation. It is essentially

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<sup>1246</sup> Iannis Xenakis, ‘Genèse de l’architecture du Pavillon,’ in *Revue Technique Philips*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1958-59), pp. 1-11; ‘L’architecture du Pavillon,’ in Charles Edouard Le Corbusier, *Le poème électronique*, (Paris, Minuit, 1958); Sterken also refers in this regard to Iannis Xenakis, ‘Le Pavillon Philips à l’aube d’une nouvelle architecture,’ in Iannis Xenakis, *Musique/Architecture*, (Tournai, Casterman, 1971), p. 125. Sterken, *op. cit.*, p. 219

<sup>1247</sup> Sven Sterken, *op. cit.*, p. 219

<sup>1248</sup> This same sort of mathematical legitimization as a form of *mystification*, can be seen in the work of composers with little mathematical knowledge, who nevertheless hint at the importance of the use of pseudo-mathematical devices as being fundamental to their technique.

<sup>1249</sup> Sterken uses the term *a priori*, to contrast it with the *a posteriori* justification he ascribes to Le Corbusier: ‘Il développe *a priori* la forme à partir de surfaces réglées et non pas après, pour maîtriser une forme libre. Ce renversement de la démarche met en opposition l’approche artistique libre de Le Corbusier et l’esprit d’ingénieur de Xenakis: chez Le Corbusier, on perçoit en quelque sorte un usage instrumentale de la rationalité: elle est un ‘outil’ pour organiser ses intuitions et expliquer *a posteriori* son émarhe. En revanche, pour Xenakis, l’acte créatif est l’explication d’une démarche méthodique et rationnelle; la rigueur de son application détermine la beauté du résultat.’ This clearly is not an *a priori* methodology, as the idea of form is not one set out *before* the actual architectural design, but based in the regulated surface as a material. His concern seems to be with how these surfaces together, from the ground up, can form a larger, continuous surface, not a manifestation of an *a priori* form.

<sup>1250</sup> Sterken, *ibid.*, p. 219

<sup>1251</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Musique/Architecture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-142

based in two dimensions; it is essentially flat,<sup>1252</sup> dividing the types of architecture in two groups: one *rectilinear* subgroup and a second, circular subgroup of *translation*. The first can be found in temple architecture, based on the notions of the straight line, the plane, and the right angle, and leads up to the modern day; and the second in the 'Neolithic houses, archaic tombs, rotunda,' fused with 'techniques from the near-east,'<sup>1253</sup> resulting in the building of domed structures. It is with the second subgroup that Xenakis finds common cause, seeing a theoretical development in terms of elasticity, and the resistance of materials. In contrast to the use of beams and other supports, Xenakis places the essence of continuity central, to be found in the new material, *reinforced concrete*. It is on this point that Trevisiol contrasts Le Corbusier (the artist) with Xenakis (the engineer), by first stating that Le Corbusier acted as an artist, 'who knows the effect he wants to achieve, and who judges as relatively secondary the technical modalities which will allow him to obtain the wanted result.'<sup>1254</sup> On the other hand,

for an engineer, a mathematician like Xenakis, in the end it is not even legitimate to dream of the resulting form, before the absolute certainty of the applied method: it is only from there that a coherent solution can be born, and especially such a solution that all the elements of the project must found themselves in one single absolute form.<sup>1255</sup>

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<sup>1252</sup> Ibid., p. 123: 'Depuis la plus haute antiquité, l'architecture n'est pas une manifestation vraiment spatiale. Elle est essentiellement fondée sur deux dimensions, elle est essentiellement plane.'

<sup>1253</sup> Trevisiol, Robert, 'Le Pavillon Philips de Le Corbusier et Xenakis,' in *Le Corbusier et Belgique*, (Paris; Brussels, FLC, 1997)

<sup>1254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1255</sup> In Trevisiol, *op. cit.*: 'Le Corbusier agit comme un artiste qui connaît l'effet auquel il veut aboutir, et qui juge relativement secondaires les modalités techniques qui lui permettront d'obtenir le résultat recherché. Pour un ingénieur, un mathématicien comme Xenakis, en revanche, à la limite il n'est pas même légitime de songer à la forme résultante, avant d'avoir la certitude de la rigueur absolue de la méthode appliquée: c'est seulement à partir de là que pourra naître une solution cohérente, et surtout une solution telle que tous les éléments du projet devront se fondre dans une seule forme absolue.' In Trevisiol, *op. cit.*

It is in Trevisiol's 'supporting' quotation from Lootsma that a contradiction appears; for Xenakis, 'the logic of the engineer can improve upon the aesthetic ideas.'<sup>1256</sup> In contrast, Sterken explains the subtle interaction between form and material (content) at work in the aesthetics of Xenakis as an architect, especially in the way in which the dynamic of the three-dimensional space is developed. In this regard, one could speak of a *temporal* unfolding of a *spatial* form, as if it concerned a mere ripple in space-time. As a temporary construction the life of the Pavilion was brief, no matter how strong its concrete was, and it disappeared rather quickly. Xenakis does not simply use this new material as an aesthetic solution (as Maarten Kloos argued)<sup>1257</sup>: his technique also constituted a critique of traditional architecture; even going as far as undermining the notion of stability and fixity, contained in the orthogonal, depth-perspectival thinking of old. This utopian project of the creation of a synthetic and dynamic space was contained in the notion of the 'dynamic variation' and the continuity of space – it became a truly three-dimensional architecture, whose designs could no longer be reduced to a two-dimensional plan; for Sterken, Xenakis considers the 'instability and time as key elements of form by using developing regulated surfaces,' prefiguring the contemporary architectural notion of the 'dynamic fold.'<sup>1258</sup> As Xenakis himself announces at the end of his essay on the *Poème électronique*, about this new architecture, which uses one new material (the reinforced concrete):

It [concrete] will certainly be replaced by lighter, more malleable [materials]. It prepared the bed in which tomorrow's plastics will form the rich stream of shapes and volumes that not only hold organic beings but above all the most abstract mathematics.<sup>1259</sup>

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<sup>1256</sup> Lootsma, *op. cit.*, p. 124

<sup>1257</sup> Maarten Kloos, 'Iannis Xenakis: muziek, architectuur, ruimte,' in *Wonen TABK*, No. 2, (1984), pp. 18-31; cited by Sterken, *op. cit.*

<sup>1258</sup> Sterken, *op. cit.*, p. 220

<sup>1259</sup> 'Il [le béton] sera certainement remplacé par des matériaux plus légers, plus malléables [...]. Il prépare le lit où les matières plastiques de demain formeront le fleuve riche de forms et de volumes que recèlent non seulement les êtres biologiques mais surtout les mathématiques les plus abstraites.' In Iannis Xenakis, *Poème électronique*, p. 135



In many ways, this thinking was further developed in his philosophy of music, specifically in his work *Metastaseis*, which translates as ‘transformations,’ and was inspired by a similar logic to the designing of the *Pavilion*. Referring to *Metastaseis*, Xenakis sees his contribution to contemporary music in the following terms:

Masses of sounds controlled like clouds by means of probabilities that shape the clouds statistically. [...] as early as *Metastaseis* with its mass glissandos I set out to create a timbre evolving in space, not through the addition of other instruments but keeping to the strings. I think this is one underlying problem of music: the shapes of the aural aspect. Not so much the pitch or even the rhythm, but essentially the colour in abrupt or gentle change.<sup>1260</sup>

The block-like structures he describes are logically linked, not in a traditional musical sense of development, but through contrast of textures. In one of his interviews, Bálint Varga asked Xenakis how this structuring aspect of compositional technique worked for Xenakis, given these fundamentally differing blocks:

It’s like sentences. In philosophical statements made by ancient Ionian philosophers [...] you have adjoining sentences that differ sharply in content. There’s no need to provide connecting lines. This is a matter of style of thinking, perhaps. You make an important statement that has an immediacy about it, and then you go on to the next one. Of course there’s a link between them, a relationship – otherwise the structure would collapse – but it’s not directly obvious.<sup>1261</sup>

Xenakis compares this structuring to the abstract paintings of Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, which, in his view, make use of simple patterns whose effect is owed to the way they are set off against one another, without a ‘smooth transition.’<sup>1262</sup> These blocks, again in reference to the opening section of *Metastaseis*, can be seen to embody the characteristic of *contiguity*, the

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<sup>1260</sup> Bálint András Varga, *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996, p. 142

<sup>1261</sup> *ibid.*, p. 143

<sup>1262</sup> *ibid.*, p. 143

second of the three aspects of the staticity of the Parmenidian being.<sup>1263</sup> These blocks, according to Solomos, are a 'hermetic totality'<sup>1264</sup> a reflection of the homogeneity and compactness of this being. As has been noted elsewhere,<sup>1265</sup> Xenakis's privileged treatment of continuity of the sound material, exemplified by his use of glissandi, establishes, according to Iliescu, a certain relation between intemporality and the continuous state.

The notion of instantaneousness which reminds us in this context of the 'now' of Parmenides allows Xenakis to make even the assumption of an abolition of all sense of anticipation. It thus appears to him as circular and as impenetrable as the concept of flux, for which it is actually a synonym.<sup>1266</sup>

This leads to the dissolution not only of time, but also of the notion of space, as it posits an equivalency between the *instant* (in which time is reduced absolutely) and the *point* (an absolute reduction of space in the mathematical sense). According to Iliescu, one could imagine the Xenakian 'sound being' as an initial and ideal simultaneity completely existing in the zero-interval of the instant.

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<sup>1263</sup> A.H. Coxon, *The Philosophy of Forms: An Analytical and Historical Commentary on Plato's Parmenides, with a New English Translation*, (Amsterdam, Van Gorkum, 1999), Coxon explains in the section on 'Likeness,' that 'from identity and difference Parmenides turns to the related topics of likeness and unlikeness and of equality and inequality, between which he interposes a discussion of contiguity. In the preceding argument he had introduced the notion of "the different itself" as opposite to "the same itself", and asserted that they exclude each other; he now argues that the difference which is predicated of two or more subjects is in every case the same.' (p. 143)

<sup>1264</sup> Solomos, *op. cit.*, 1993 p 123

<sup>1265</sup> See our paper on the topic of the arborescence: Joris De Henau, 'Gmeeoorh (1974) for Organ by Iannis Xenakis – Towards a Critique of the Arborescence', in Anastasia Georgaki, and Makis Solomos (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Symposium Iannis Xenakis*, (Athens, University of Athens, 2005), pp. 150-160

<sup>1266</sup> Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p .38. 'La notion d'instantané, qui nous rappelle dans ce contexte le 'maintenant' parméniénien permet à Xenakis de formuler même l'hypothèse d'une abolition de toute notion d'antériorité. Celle-ci lui apparaît ainsi comme 'circulaire et aussi impénétrable que la notion de flux, dont elle serait en fait un synonyme.'

The third aspect of this ‘sound being,’ immobility, is addressed by Xenakis in his *Vers une philosophie de la musique*.<sup>1267</sup> He situates in Parmenides’s attempt to go the extreme consequences of his thinking on the

‘[...] question of change by denying it, the opposite of Heraclitus. He discovered the principle of excluded middle and logical tautology and it was such a glare that he used them as a knife to cut into the evanescent changing meaning the notion of being, what is motionless, filling the universe with no birth and imperishable, and the non-being does not exist, limited and spherical [...].’<sup>1268</sup>

It is therefore *not* a reification of time in the Bergsonian sense, but a necessity: the devaluation of time can be explained, according to Iliescu,<sup>1269</sup> by its incapacity in terms of an evanescent flux, to fix an ordered structure, on its own. In other words, it is not sufficient to trust time’s unfolding for a given order to appear. This implies the necessity of immobility, space’s characteristic, to be transposed in time. However, this is to be characterized as follows:

Music can be defined as an organization of such operations and on the basis of relationships between beings or between the functions of sound beings. [...] As a very general point of view, fundamental to where we want to scrutinize and make music, the primary Time appears as a waxy material, a clay in which the operations and relations come to inscribe, to etch themselves, first for work purposes and later for the purpose of communication to third parties.<sup>1270</sup>

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<sup>1267</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *op. cit.*,

<sup>1268</sup> Xenakis, *Musique architecture*, p. 73: ‘[...] question du changement en le niant, à l’opposé d’Héraclite. Il découvrit le principe du tiers exclu et de la tautologie logiques et ce fut un tel éblouissement qu’il les utilisa comme un couteau pour découper dans le changement évanescent des sens la notion de l’étant, de ce qui est, un, immobile, remplissant l’univers, sans naissance et impérissable, et, le non-étant n’existant pas, limité et sphérique[...].’

<sup>1269</sup> Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 39

<sup>1270</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, *op. cit.*, p. 16-17: ‘La musique peut donc être définie comme une organisation de ces opérations et de ces relations élémentaires entre des êtres ou entre des fonctions d’êtres sonores. [...] De ce point de vue très général, fondamental, d’où nous voulons scruter et *faire* la musique, le Temps primaire apparaît comme une matière cireuse, une glaise dans laquelle les opérations et les relations viennent s’inscrire, se graver pour des fins de travail d’abord et par la suite pour des fins de communication au tiers.’

Xenakis' concept of a *malleable* time here becomes equivalent to space – a 'temporal plastic' art<sup>1271</sup> or 'a plastic modulation of the sound material.'<sup>1272</sup> However, music is not a simple reified temporal art, or at least it is not automatic. In fact, music participates both in the outside-time space and in the temporal flux.<sup>1273</sup>

It would also be mistaken to identify only this first, often monumental phase of sculpting time in massive glissandi. Within his oeuvre, Xenakis could not justify repeating these grand *gestures*, as in the opening of *Metastaseis*, but found instead an increasingly *discontinuous* musical material. As Solomos explains in this regard, the central gesture *par excellence* of Xenakis may be the linear glissando. The melodic line is flattened to its exterior contours, and presents an absolute continuity. Solomos claims that this opening *sound-object* has a double nature, leading from a unison to a cluster over the complete register of the orchestra. It constitutes in one sense a *mass*: the listener loses herself in the 41 second part of a seven-minute composition, whilst the *Gestalt* of this glissando does not stem from a rich *inner* life. On the other hand, it consists of a gesture in which the complex lines, with a homogeneous timbre of strings, is extremely difficult to penetrate: 'Impotent, [the listener] passively witnesses the progressive unfolding, the fatal fulfillment of a gesture.'<sup>1274</sup>

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<sup>1271</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, p. 19. Cited in Iliescu, op. cit., p. 39

<sup>1272</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, p. 30.

<sup>1273</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Kéleütha. Écrits*, Paris: L'Arche, 1994, p. 94-101

<sup>1274</sup> Makis Solomos, *Iannis Xenakis*, (Echos du XXe siècle), Mercuès: P.O. Éditions, 1996, p. 155: 'impuissant, il assiste passivement au déploiement progressif, à l'accomplissement fatal d'un geste.'

### Beyond the glissandi: the *sound being* as fragment

Xenakis moved gradually away from the use of glissandi, although he retained the notion of the *Gestalt*.<sup>1275</sup> However, this movement can be described as an increasing fragmentation of the gliding gestures.

The smooth figure, serene, of the glissando, which transforms time into space, is removed in favour of gestures based on discretization, reintroducing the rhythmic pulse as a counterweight to the attempt to abolish time.<sup>1276</sup>

An example of this sequence of increasingly discrete and brief fragments is *Nomos alpha*, which still uses glissandi, but on a much smaller scale than in *Metastaseis*, for example. A further development which retained traces of the glissando as a gesture, could be seen in the development of the UPIC computer interface, which allows one to *draw* the individual sounds and the overall form of a piece of music.<sup>1277</sup>

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<sup>1275</sup> Iliescu wrote in this regard that, ‘The transformations undergone by the glissando – a sonic signature – reflect Xenakis’ stylistic evolution since the 1950s. His earliest *glissandi* resulted from a direct conversion into sound of a visual element, the line. They provided a solution to a thorny problem with which Xenakis was confronted at the time when he composed *Metastaseis*: how to connect large vertical aggregates in a logical way. For him, replacing traditional harmonic writing – discontinuous chordal entities – with continuous lattices of glissandi was, in fact, a way of cutting the Gordian knot of serial hyper-complexity. In his orchestral works of the 1950s, the massed glissandi create a kind of sonic morphology, the evolutive shapes or figures also evoking the notion of “gestalt.” These shapes would still play an important part twenty years later, in compositions such as *Empreintes* (1975).’ See Miha Iliescu, ‘Notes on the Late-Period Xenakis,’ in *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3 (2002), p. 134; originally ‘Xenakis et le “destin” musical de l’Occident,’ in Makis Solomos (ed.), *Présences de Iannis Xenakis*, (Paris, CDMC, 2001), pp. 53-58

<sup>1276</sup> Solomos, *op. cit.*, p. 156: ‘La figure lisse, sereine, du glissando, qui transforme le temps en espace, est évacuée au profit des gestes basés sur la discrétisation qui réintroduisent le rythme-pulsation comme un démenti à la tentative d’abolir le temps.’

<sup>1277</sup> See for example, Anastasia Georgaki, Being interested in linking research with architectural design in many respects, invented the very idea of the interface for musical design. Though he did not invent rule-based design per se, his working method sublimated rule-based design, transforming it from mere ‘shop-talk’ to near iconic status. The table of architectural design has been transformed to an interactive acoustic terrain where the image was translated to sound. The sound-design system UPIC (1977), one of his pure technological achievements,

Another interesting example can be found in *Musiques formelles*, specifically the stochastic compositional technique used to create *Syrmos* for 18 instruments. This work was written in 1959, using stochastic transformations of 8 basic textures.

- a) horizontal parallel networks
- b) ascending parallel networks (glissandi)
- c) descending parallel networks (glissandi)
- d) crossing parallel networks (ascending and descending)
- e) pizzicati clouds
- f) atmospheres of *col legno* with short glissandi *col legno*
- g) geometrical configurations of convergent or divergent glissandi
- h) configurations of glissandi treated as regulated surfaces

Xenakis explains that the mechanism applied here is in fact rather simple and forms a model for much more complex ones, but functions as a catalyst for further studies. Based on the idea of elementary grains, Xenakis argues that nothing stops the exploration and extension of this structuring method or composition of ‘sound beings’ which have more than three dimensions.<sup>1278</sup> He refers in this case to the *criteria* for definitions of sound beings such as *timbre*, *degree of order*, *density*, *variation* and so on, as well as *criteria* for defining elementary structures of a more complex nature, ‘melodic and temporal structures of groups of sounds, instrumental,

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stands as an autonomous tool outside his theories. This innovative invention not only exalts Xenakis’ pedagogical and compositional approach, but also opens new directions in the conception of music instruments, and especially on interface design as a medium between performer and computer. After all, we could say that Xenakis stands also as one of the mentors of new interfaces in computer and visual music.’

<sup>1278</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, p. 97

spatial and cinematic structures,' as demonstrated in *Syrmos*.<sup>1279</sup> Crucially, the resulting sound is, again according to Xenakis, not guaranteed *a priori* by the calculations, but intuition and experience ought to play a guiding, decisive and test role.<sup>1280</sup>

Figure 27: Iannis Xenakis, *Syrmos* (1959), p. 18<sup>1281</sup>

It is at this point that the category of *outside-time* (*hors temps*) should be reconsidered: Xenakis explains in *Musique/Architecture* that it was with Debussy and Messiaen that the category of *outside-time* was reintroduced in music, in contrast to the general movement towards *in-time* structures:<sup>1282</sup> 'Effectively, atonality supresses the scales and accept the *outside-time* neutrality of

<sup>1279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1280</sup> Xenakis, *Musiques formelles*, p. 98

<sup>1281</sup> The material presented on this page is a combination of the *col legno* texture (f) (violins I: 4-6) and crossing parallel networks ('celli and basses). I will return to this exact fragment in the analysis of *Duel*, as it borrows from these bars.

<sup>1282</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Musique Architecture*, p. 82-83

the half-step.<sup>1283</sup> Xenakis considers Schoenberg's technique as a '*in-time* ordering [*ordonnance en-temps*].'<sup>1284</sup>

### A Philosophy of Revelation

An important aspect of Xenakis's philosophy, which has received relatively little attention,<sup>1285</sup> is the notion of revelation, which is closely connected to the idea mentioned above, of the composer as artisan. For Xenakis, the 'beauty' of the theoretical consideration must always be controlled by the concrete realisation in the score. This idea of testing out an instrument, for example the organ or the piano, has been clearly testified by various musicians and performers.<sup>1286</sup> This interest in the experiment is not a solipsistic one; it is a pragmatism leading to proposing artistic bets, which he seems to win more often than not.<sup>1287</sup> Further according to Solomos, Xenakis insists in this regard on the notion of *revelation*, of intuition, of inspiration. 'On

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<sup>1283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1284</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>1285</sup> Solomos, op. cit., p. 115-117. Solomos quotes from Xenakis's thesis *Arts/Science. Alliages*, as well as the opening of *Musiques formelles*, op. cit., p. 15

<sup>1286</sup> See Solomos, op. cit., p. 112. My own research revealed such intense preoccupation with the organ on the part of Xenakis, who sent for a comprehensive recording of each stop of the organ in New Britain. This material was used by Xenakis as an experiential database – in other words, he studied the instruments from a radically different perspective than traditional musicians and composers would have done. Although never ironic, in the final score of *Gmeeeorb* for organ (1974), this research has been transformed into a music of both intense dynamic contrasts (he prescribes boards to be fitted and depressed onto the totality of keys and keyboards, in order to achieve a cluster of extreme proportions, much like the complete orchestral cluster in the opening of *Metastaseis*). See: Joris De Henau, *Gmeeeorb et la musique nouvelle pour orgue. Histoire et analyse*, MA thesis, (Paris, Université Paris IV, Sorbonne, 2004); see also Peter Hill, 'Xenakis and the Performer,' in *Tempo*, Vol. 112 (1975) pp. 17-22; S. Pruslin, in *Tempo* Vol. 115 (1975), p. 54; also P. Hill, *Tempo*, Vol. 116 (1976), p. 54

<sup>1287</sup> Solomos, op. cit., p. 113



the spark of the moment where, suddenly, the unfulfilling stage of the experience leads finally to discovery.<sup>1288</sup>

This idea of sudden discovery is of course of great interest in the context of this thesis, as it reveals in a very similar way the actual objective element of the music, in a moment of ‘revelation’ or dialectical standstill. The produced image is, obviously, one produced here by a transformation of the material – the test-results of trying out the instruments to their physical limits, the engineering and calculations in the preparatory stages of composing – or in other words the stages the composer successively encounters are seen as experiences. This leaves traces in the composition, but themselves lack inspiration – according to Solomos, they leave the listener free to judge them.<sup>1289</sup>

In the introduction to his thesis *Arts/Science. Alliages*, Xenakis implicitly pleaded for an philosophy, in which he considers this notion of revelation as *autonomous*. He distinguishes three dimensions in art: the inferential mode, the experimental mode, and the revelation. As to the latter, he writes:

In addition to these two modes, the inferential and the experimental, art lives in a third [dimension]: that of immediate revelation, which is neither inferential nor experimental. The revelation of the beautiful is made immediately, directly, ignorant of the fact of art, as to the connaisseur. This is the power of art and it seems its superiority to the sciences; as it lives in the two dimensions of the inferential and the experimental, art possesses a third, the most mysterious of all, as it helps the art

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<sup>1288</sup> Ibid., p. 113 ‘[...] sur le jaillissement de l’étincelle au moment où, brusquement, le stade ingrat de l’expérience débouche enfin sur la découverte.’

<sup>1289</sup> Ibid., p. 113

objects escape from any aesthetic science, by allowing the caresses of the inferential and the experimental.<sup>1290</sup>

In an interview with François-Bernard Mâche, Xenakis explains his philosophical position in the following terms. Mâche asks:

The definition just mentioned ['of expressing music by intelligible means'] poses a political problem,<sup>1291</sup> not just an epistemological one. Is this rationality that claims to be of universal value form the humanistic tone of the formula? Xenakis seems to rule out any design that refuses to assimilate the music to a human convention, and where it is not a matter for consciousness to “express” something, but to reveal a pre-existing reality.<sup>1292</sup>

Xenakis answers that he does not believe his point of view to be particularly ‘humanist’ and criticizes a romantic humanism. For him, intelligence is everywhere.

I start from the principle that there is an objective world. I can’t prove this, obviously, but it is an option. From the moment we take this option, we will discover around us an intelligible universe.<sup>1293</sup>

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<sup>1290</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Arts/Sciences. Alliages*, (Tournai, Casterman, 1979); translated by Sharon Kanach, *Arts/Sciences. Alloys*, (Stuyvesant NY, Pendragon Press, 1985), p. 4

<sup>1291</sup> For a further discussion of this connection with the political, see Miha Iliescu, ‘Espace musical et espace socio-politique: connotations de la conception massique de Xenakis,’ in Jean-Marc Chouvel, and Makis Solomos (eds.), *L'espace: Musique/Philosophie*, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 265-278; translated into German by Annette Theis, ‘Schlacht- und Klangfelder. Konnotationen einer Massenkonzepion bei Xenakis,’ in *MusikTexte*, No. 90, (2001), pp. 29-35

<sup>1292</sup> Mâche, François Bernard, ‘Exprimer l’intelligence I,’ interview with Iannis Xenakis, in *L'Arc*, Vol. 51, p. 18. ‘La definition qu’on vient de citer [“exprimer la musique par des moyens intelligibles”] pose un problem politique, et non seulement épistémologique. Cette rationalité qui pretend à une valeur universelle est-elle une forme par la tonalité humaniste de la formule. Xenakis semble écarter toute conception qui se refuse à assimiler la musique à une convention humaine, et où il ne s’agit pas, pour la conscience, d’ “exprimer” quelque chose, mais de reveller une réalité préexistante.’ See also Iannis Xenakis, *Musique/Architecture*,

<sup>1293</sup> Ibid, p. 18: ‘Je pars du principe qu’il existe un monde objectif. Je ne peux pas le prouver, bien sûr, c’est une option. Mais à partir du moment où nous prenons cette option, nous découvrons autour de nous un univers intelligible.’

Xenakis continues by suggesting a modification of the definition cited above, by saying that what is expressed is a worldview. He also modifies his theoretical stance of his earlier work, when he started to study and apply stochastics in music in the 1950s.

But I was convinced that one had to take the problems of music that way. Later, I realized that the calculation of probabilities allowed me to solve some problems, but there were others that remained in the shadows: time, and mental structures.<sup>1294</sup>

If anything, for Xenakis, the use of technology, a means humans have given themselves to act in a certain way, is not a political choice (as François-Bernard Mâche suggests of industrialization), but one of survival.<sup>1295</sup>

Intelligence for Xenakis is not to be reduced to the use of technology exclusively, however, this is not only rationality in the sense of classical determinism. Mathematics also works in the [sphere of the] irrational; it constructs irrational edifices.<sup>1296</sup>

### **On the praxis of montage: elements, objects and textures**

In this regard, a closer look into the actual practice of self-borrowing, in light of his philosophy of music, is required. Benoît Gibson describes how Iannis Xenakis used the technique of montage in his works.<sup>1297</sup> He writes that

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<sup>1294</sup> 'Mais j'étais convaincu qu'il fallait prendre les problèmes de la musique par là. Plus tard, je me suis aperçu que le calcul des probabilités m'avait permis de résoudre certains problèmes, mais qu'il y en avait d'autres qui restaient dans l'ombre: le temps, les structures mentales.' Ibid.

<sup>1295</sup> This is consistent with the view of technology as an epiphenomenon of consciousness, as discussed above.

<sup>1296</sup> 'Ce n'est pas seulement la rationalité au sens du déterminisme classique. Les mathématiques travaillent aussi dans l'irrationnel, elles construisent des edifices irrationnels.' Ibid.

<sup>1297</sup> Benoît Gibson, 'Self-borrowing in the instrumental music of Iannis Xenakis,' in Anastasia Georgaki, and Makis Solomos (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Symposium Iannis Xenakis*, (Athens, University of Athens, 2005), pp. 265-274 and *The Instrumental Music of Iannis Xenakis. Theory, Practice, Self-Borrowing*, (Sharon Kanach (ed.), Iannis Xenakis Series), (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2011)

The formalization of music attempted by Xenakis encouraged the practice of montage by developing a conception of form based on the juxtaposition or superimposition of predefined pictures. Xenakis uses sectional forms; and many of his pieces fall into a series of independent sections on the basis of textural contrast.<sup>1298</sup>

Crucially, this compositional strategy involves the return to earlier scores, from which he ‘extracts fragments or passages that can then be reassembled to create new objects or textures.’<sup>1299</sup> For him, the idea of an object ‘relies on the graphic representation where each component occupies a defined position.’<sup>1300</sup> These objects are constituted by ‘geometric figures, arborescences or other forms derived from the principles of cellular automata.’<sup>1301</sup> The textures moreover, are ‘created without restriction by juxtaposition or superimposition of independent elements.’<sup>1302</sup> In reference to the different types of musical temporality, Gibson concludes that in ‘Xenakis’ terms, we could say that objects are formed “in–time,” various textures are created ‘outside–time.’

For Gibson, this is part of a practical compositional technique. He argues that the choice of an element, object or texture is not isolated in terms of method: this choice

also implies criteria according to which the material is selected and inserted. Depending on the type of material fit for a given context, Xenakis may select only part of the excerpt, for instance, a layer consisting of one instrument or a group of instruments. As independent sonorities these layers can in turn be combined with other textures or objects. Then the process of selection and insertion of

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<sup>1298</sup> Gibson, *The Instrumental Music of Iannis Xenakis*, *op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>1299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. Gibson states that the notion of the object does not refer to Pierre Schaeffer’s sound object. See Pierre Schaeffer, *Le traité des objets musicaux*, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil 1966), p. 268

<sup>1300</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 4

<sup>1301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1302</sup> *Ibid.*

materials comprises for general cases depending on whether or not the excerpt is taking up entirely, inserted alone or combined with other elements.<sup>1303</sup>

The borrowing of an instrumentation may be changed to achieve a lesser or greater density, compared with the original. Gibson points out that the textural borrowings can be ‘filtered’ or expanded ‘by hand.’<sup>1304</sup> Another important element concerns their *duration*, which may equally be adapted to the new environment. However,

Some elements and objects have an intrinsic length. In other cases, duration can be prescribed by theoretical considerations was simply chosen by the composer's free will.<sup>1305</sup>

Gibson is categorical when he explains the centrality of the arborescence in terms of Xenakis’s self-borrowing:

The designated objects of Xenakis’ self-borrowing is the arborescence. Confined in time, they possess their own duration. That is why, most frequently, Xenakis, borrows them without altering the structure.<sup>1306</sup>

An example of a work using arborescences is, for example, *Gmeeoorb* for Organ (1974)

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<sup>1303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1306</sup> Ibid.



A distinction with the opening of *Metastaseis*, which also built on the idea of lines branching off of a root, or *Syrmos* for 18 musicians, however, the arborescences were not drawn with a ruler – they are drawn in a freer fashion. As Gibson explain in this regard, a distinction exist between two kinds of arborescence, either

as an ongoing flow of continuous motion or as objects. Considered as objects, arborescences are delimited in time. They can be reproduced and transformed as if representing a kind of generalisation of the melodic principle.<sup>1310</sup>

Gibson points to the years 1973 and 1974, when the arborescences, originally simple tree-like structures, developed into more complex forms, ‘by means of a series of transformations and dynamic and timbral changes.’<sup>1311</sup> The interest lies in how he describes the sound object, in the context of the music of *Noomena*:

A drawing may define the outlines of an object, its general contours, its shape, but does not always reveal the details that make it interesting or ‘alive.’ We know that Xenakis gives great importance both to the global architecture of his compositions and to the minute details, sometimes even indicating the number of beats between two sounds. He often acts as if he were sculpting the interior of the sound, to bring the object to life, to deploy it in a multidimensional space.<sup>1312</sup>

That the arborescences as individual structures could be understood as *sound objects* (or, in Xenakis’s terms, *sound beings*)<sup>1313</sup> with a certain level of definition – i.e. they are not so fragmented or loosely defined as to be shapeless or characterless as mere abstract textures – comes to the fore when seen to be transcribed from the graphic preparatory score, ‘sometimes [even] reversed by the composer.’<sup>1314</sup> This means that Xenakis imbued them with enough content as to warrant

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<sup>1310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1311</sup> Ibid., p. 151

<sup>1312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1313</sup> the relation between sound objects, as I have argued, and the Xenakian *sound being* could be further elaborated.

However, they are not entirely dissimilar in that a dialectic of *becoming* can be discovered at their core.

<sup>1314</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*

their re-use, no matter to which level of transformation. In fact, as Gibson points out, Xenakis himself made a statement in an interview with Jean-Yves Bosseur<sup>1315</sup> as to the imperative dynamic aspect of these objects:

There has to be a dynamic effect; otherwise, they have no meaning,[...] They have to mean something from the sonorous point of view, even if they do not correspond to what you hear.<sup>1316</sup>

### **Heteronomous music: the case of *Duel***

In the composition *Duel* (1959), Xenakis establishes a framework for a game-theory based, competitive work which pits two orchestras with a conductor each against one another, defined as a zero-sum game.<sup>1317</sup> The material with which they *play* the game consists in sonic events put at their disposal by the composer. *Duel*, moreover, is the first work by Xenakis which uses montage techniques throughout, as Benoît Gibson points out.<sup>1318</sup> Not unlike Feldman's considerations of musical memory,<sup>1319</sup> Xenakis investigates the nature of musical form, as he remarked in reference to *Achorripsis*, where he attempts to avoid repetition of the material (or 'data'):

Now the question is, when heard a number of times, will this music keep its surprise effect? Will it not change into a set of *foreseeable* phenomena through the existence of memory, despite the fact that the law of frequencies has been derived from the laws of chance?<sup>1320</sup>

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<sup>1315</sup> Jean-Yves Bosseur, 'Iannis Xenakis,' in *Le sonore et le visuel*, (Paris, Disvoir, 1992), pp. 41-50 as cited by Gibson, op. cit., p. 151

<sup>1316</sup> *ibid.*, p 49

<sup>1317</sup> For a non-musical example, see the classic game of nuts as formulated on <http://tavistocksociety.wikia.com/wiki/Nuts> [accessed on 31 February 2013]

<sup>1318</sup> Benoît Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 15

<sup>1319</sup> See Chapter 6

<sup>1320</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, op. cit., p. 37; as cited in Benoît Gibson, op. cit., p. 14



A further element of this text is of note, namely, the idea that variations may be created (perhaps even by computers), and ‘there would thus arise a music which can be distorted in the course of time, giving the same observer *n* results apparently due to chance for *n* performances.’<sup>1321</sup>

Similarly, for the score of *Duel*, Xenakis assembled six different textures<sup>1322</sup> or ‘sonic constructions put into mutual correspondence’:<sup>1323</sup>

- Event I:* A cluster of sonic grains such as pizzicato, blows with the wooden part of the bow [*col legno*], and very brief arco sounds distributed stochastically
- Event II:* Parallel sustained strings with fluctuations
- Event III:* Networks of intertwined string glissandi
- Event IV:* Stochastic percussion sounds
- Event V:* Stochastic wind instrument sounds
- Event VI:* Silence

That these events qualify as individual, with a specific character or texture different from the other ‘events’ or textures, is specifically mentioned in Xenakis’ own analysis of this work.<sup>1324</sup> As to the question how the combination of events can be judged, Xenakis explicitly builds a ‘qualitative matrix’ on the basis of his subjective evaluations.<sup>1325</sup> It becomes clear that the introduction of *Event VI* (silence) changes the outcomes of any two simultaneous events, as it

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<sup>1321</sup> Ibid.; Xenakis remarks that in the long run the ‘performances will be *statistically* identical with each other, the identity being defied once for all by the ‘vector matrix.’ See *Formalized music*, p. 37

<sup>1322</sup> Xenakis explains elsewhere in *Formalized Music* what sonic events constitute of; speaking of large ensemble of elements, including cicadas in a summer field, he argues that : ‘These sonic events are made out of thousands of isolated sounds; this multitude of sounds, seen as a totality, is a new sonic event. This mass event is articulated and forms a **plastic mould of time** [my stress], which itself follows aleatory and stochastic laws.’

<sup>1323</sup> Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 113-114

<sup>1324</sup> Ibid., p. 114

<sup>1325</sup> Ibid.

creates so-called 'saddle-points'<sup>1326</sup> Each of the potential combinations is qualified from 'passable-' to 'very good,' and each of these qualities is given a number (from 'passable-'=0 to 'very good'=5). Xenakis then changes the values of the combination of *Event VI* with itself from passable to good; he explains that the purpose here is 'to find a mixed strategy; that is to say, a weighed multiplicity of tactics of which none may be zero [i.e. passable-].'<sup>1327</sup> In order to make the game fair, Xenakis introduces further necessary modifications, both to the scores of particular combinations<sup>1328</sup> and by showing how when the optimum strategies can vary so widely, a 'final matrix' with accompanying strategies is needed.<sup>1329</sup> He concludes that

Mathematical manipulation has brought about a refinement of the duel and the emergence of a paradox: the couple VI, VI, characterizing total silence. Silence is to be avoided, but to do this it is necessary to augment its potentiality.

A further, aesthetic point to be made is that of a music which is, according to Xenakis, *heteronomous*.<sup>1330</sup> As he explains, the introduction of an external conflict has been part of musical discourse in (European) folk music, in 'competitive forms of music in which two instrumentalists strive to confound one another, [...] all the while remaining within the musical context of the tradition which permits this special kind of improvisation.'<sup>1331</sup> He sees a logical extension of this practice in modern music as legitimate:

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<sup>1326</sup> In Matrix 1 (*MT*), without Event VI, 'the largest minimum per row and the smallest maximum per column do not coincide, and consequently the game has no saddle point and no pure strategy.' *Event VI* is qualified as 'p', which stands for 'passable.' However, Xenakis qualifies silence in exactly the same terms as all the other individual events on their own. In other words, it is only from the combination with one other *Event* that a quality other than passable is created. These also include passable-, passable+, good, good+, and very good. See Iannis Xenakis, *op. cit.*, p. 114

<sup>1327</sup> Xenakis, *op. cit.*, p. 119

<sup>1328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1329</sup> Ibid., p. 119-120

<sup>1330</sup> Xenakis, *op. cit.*, p. 112

<sup>1331</sup> Ibid.

A *musical heteronomy* based on modern science is thus legitimate even to the most conformist eye. But the problem is not the historical justification of a new adventure; quite the contrary, it is the enrichment and the leap forward that count. Just as stochastic processes brought a beautiful generalization to the complexity of linear polyphony and the deterministic logic of musical discourse, and at the same time disclosed an unsuspected opening on a totally asymmetric aesthetic form hitherto qualified as nonsense; in the same way *heteronomy* introduces into stochastic music a complement of dialectical structure.<sup>1332</sup>

This idea of heteronomy at the level of the compositional process points to an ideal of an almost romantic nature: beauty is to be found in the tension at the level of form. To underline the point of this mediation of extremes, Xenakis gives an example of what he terms ‘a degenerate game,’ a version of *Duel* where one of the parties ‘play arbitrarily following a more or less improvised route, without any conditioning for conflict, and therefore without any new compositional argument.’ He calls this a *false game*.<sup>1333</sup>

That Xenakis’s interest in the work’s form is indeed paramount; as explained above, the combination of particular textures and their relative weighing is based on criteria not further specified in his own analysis. As Gibson argues, the underlying technique is one of montage, on two fronts, in terms of its formal design and in the borrowing of materials from other works. The first, according to Gibson, is to be found at the formal level. Rather than understanding the heteronomy of a strategy designed *outside* of the music, as Xenakis argued, for Gibson montage is ‘already latent’ in the formal conception of *Duel*:

Each conductor must choose excerpts from a series of textures. The final result depends on the aesthetic value associated with the juxtaposition or superimposition of the sonic events. By leaving the

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<sup>1332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1333</sup> Ibid., p. 113

choice of the sonic events to the conductors, Xenakis generates an open form, a sort of montage in real time.<sup>1334</sup>

It is at this point that the crucial link with music I have described earlier, in accordance with Gianmario Borio's theorizations, can be seen as related to the idea of an aesthetic of the *informel*; however, this is not to recruit a composer such as Xenakis as a hitherto unknown member of a school of composition, but to show that similar ideas were developed by radically different composers around 1960.

Xenakis himself expresses the difficulty of casting the calculations in definite terms and a defence of the aesthetics of this work:

It is impossible to describe in these pages the fundamental role of the mathematical treatment of this problem, or the subtle arguments we are forced to make on the way. We must be vigilant at every moment and over every part of the matrix area. It is an instance of the kind of work where detail is dominated by the whole, and whole dominated by the detail. It was to show the value of this intellectual labour that we judged it useful to set out the process of calculation.<sup>1335</sup>

It is clear, then, that Xenakis took seriously the dialectics at the core of the compositional process, and the way in which the work realizes this open-ended plan. Not only does this work's conception provide an example of montage at the level of the materials used, as Gibson argues, Xenakis's primary concern was formal; however, he also found that the sonic materials used were borrowed from earlier works, 'to fill the empty spaces delineated by the formal structure.'<sup>1336</sup> These borrowings are from three works in particular: *Syrmos* (1959), *Achorripsis* (1959), and *NEG-ALE* (1960). The extent of these borrowings has been listed in tables by

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<sup>1334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1336</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 16

Gibson,<sup>1337</sup> and can respectively be linked to *Duel I*, *II* and *III* (*Syrmos*), *Duel IV* and *V* (*Achorripsis*) and *Duel IV* (*NEG-ALE*).<sup>1338</sup>

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Iannis Xenakis's *Duel I* (1959), bars 1-3. The score is for two orchestras and includes parts for strings, woodwinds, and percussion. The title "DUEL pour 2 orchestres" is written in the top right. The score is divided into four systems, each with a measure number (1, 2, 3, 4) and a tempo marking "D ~ 60 HH". The notation is dense and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 29: Iannis Xenakis, *Duel I* (1959), bars 1-3

<sup>1337</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 164-171

<sup>1338</sup> A few examples of the way in which borrowings are treated and combined in *Duel* can be found in Chapters I and II. Gibson, *op. cit.*

These so-called ‘borrowings’ in the case of *Duel* are basically literal quotations from the other works mentioned above. The above fragment from *Duel I*, or *Event I*, is borrowed from the score of *Syrmos*; bars 1 and 2 of Violin I (1) can be found in bars 105-106 of Violin I (1) and bar 3 corresponds to bar 107 (in retrograde) in *Syrmos* (see Figure 21 in this thesis, p. 386); the same is the case for *Duel* Violin I (2) – *Syrmos* Violin I (2). *Duel* Violin I (3-6), bars 1-3, is a borrowing from *Syrmos* Violins I (3-6) bars 105-107. *Duel* Violin II (1), bars 1-3, is a borrowing from 105-107 in the same part in *Syrmos*. Bars 1-2 in Violin II (2) is borrowed from bars 106-107 in *Syrmos*. Bars 1-3 in Violin II (3-6) is borrowed from 105-107 in Violin II (3-6) in *Syrmos*. The violoncelli and bass parts are borrowed from bars 105-107 in the same parts in *Syrmos*.

For borrowings from *Achorriopsis* (1959), they can be found in *Duel IV*, or *Event IV*. For example, these borrowings, according to Gibson, stretch beyond the pitch-based borrowings seen in *Duel I*. It concerns the bongo in bars 4 and 5 (see below), which are borrowed from the xylophone in *Achorriopsis*, bars 77-78.

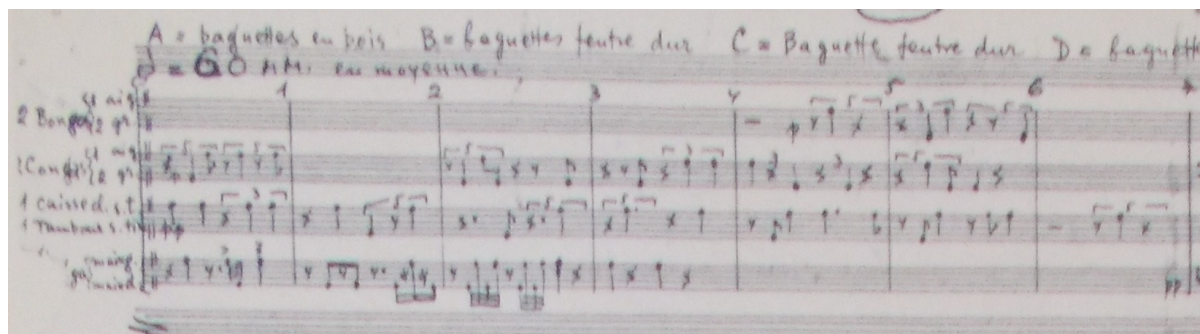


Figure 30: Iannis Xenakis, *Duel IV*, bars 1-7



Figure 31: Iannis Xenakis, *Achorriopsis*, p. 19, bars 77-78<sup>1339</sup>

<sup>1339</sup> In fact, the two bongo parts in *Duel IV* (high and low, or ‘aigu’ and ‘grave’ in the original score) share the xylophone material, especially in the triplet section; however, it is the sequence of quintuplet, triplet, quintuplet which is prominent.



Another borrowing from *Achorripsis* can be found in *Duel V* in the woodwinds; it concerns the piccolo, clarinet in E $\flat$  and the bass clarinet in bars 0-6, which correspond to the same instruments in bars 51-57. The oboe (bars 0-4) borrows from the same instrument in bars 60-64 (in retrograde); bassoon, and contrabassoon borrow from 58-64 (in retrograde).

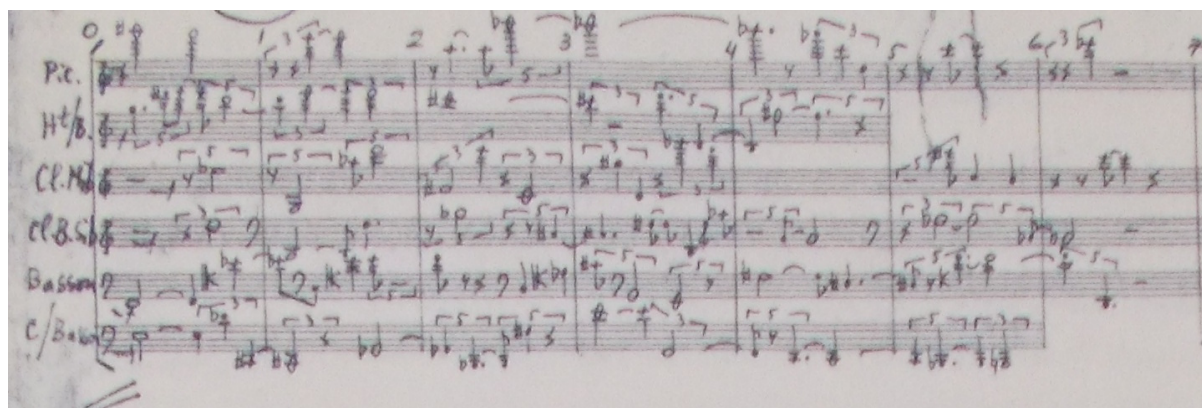


Figure 32: Iannis Xenakis, *Duel V*, bars 1-6



Figure 33: Iannis Xenakis, *Achorripsis*, p. 14, bars 51-53

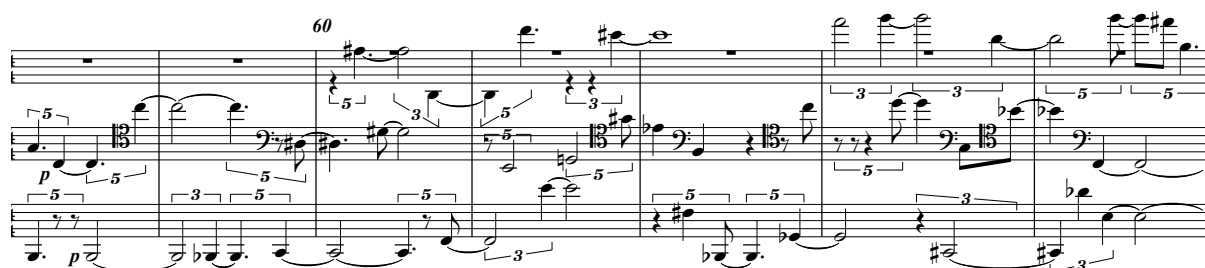


Figure 34: Iannis Xenakis, *Achorripsis*, p. 14-16, bars 58-64

The manipulations of the material, in this case rather straightforward, point towards a dual concept of the material: one where the pitch content becomes exchangeable and receding to a second plane of importance; and one where the priority lies in the *texture*, in other words, a spatial (acoustic) frame of mind. In *Duel*, the temporality of the six individual sonic entities or fragments and their duration (each lasting about two minutes),<sup>1340</sup> are dissolved into a combination matrix, in which two of them will sound at the same time, in the same acoustic space. This means that Xenakis calculated not only the acoustic possibilities of these juxtapositions, but also the non-repetitive nature of these combinations, based on the urge not to repeat what in origin was stochastically designed musical material. Although Xenakis presents the retrograde of material borrowed from *Syrmos*, *Achorripsis* and *NEG-ALE*, he does not change the instrumentation of the individual borrowings. In other words, this compositional praxis is in essence concerned with a textural approach to the musical material. Moreover, the borrowings from *Syrmos* and *Achorripsis* show also a fastidious and faithfulness to the shape of the original arborescences. Aesthetically this could be described as a dialectic of form and content, where one fundamentally influences the other. Individual lines – as circumscribed by the range of the instruments – fit a larger design (with shapes of differing types: punctual sound-clouds, arborescences, etc.), however, in combination they form an aural texture, no longer either a simple or complex visual shape or two-dimensional design. Xenakis insisted on this sonic presentation as a necessary counterpart to what seems to some theorists a primordially visual way of thinking, even to the point of excluding the importance of the sonic result of this method.<sup>1341</sup> At a deeper level, this search and recognition of the need for variability between performances, the age-old idea of competition in musical terms, and the openness of the

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<sup>1340</sup> cf. the introduction to the score of *Duel*.

<sup>1341</sup> See Joris De Henau, 'Towards a Critique of the Arborescence,' *op. cit.*; Makis Solomos argues that for Xenakis it is the visual which takes precedence over any other concern. I argue that this is incorrect.



structural play of a limited number of choice materials, creating what can be termed an open form, can be related to the concern of this thesis with an aesthetic of the *informel*. In other words, a work like *Duel* unwittingly inscribes itself in a philosophical search for a music which finds a way out of the *cul-de-sac* of compositional hyper-determination and predictability, by drawing precisely on the will to victory in an essentially pointless endeavour of musical gamesmanship. Paradoxically, by following the rules the most conscientiously, a conductor, traditionally the locus of romantic delusional-projection and hero-worship for respectively the conductor's ego and the audience's desire for a stage presence of what is in nuce the composer's impotent understudy – the as-if of the craft of real-time composition flowing from a magic wand – can potentially win a prize, which he has always deserved – in his/her own eyes – but never had received. The textural contrast of the six sonic events from which he or she can choose is a false one, in a sense the freedom to decide is minimal, as calculated by the omnipotent composer, but, at the same time, within this limited field of choices, the conductor must make the taboos – the rule of the game – his/her own. Doing so will bring the reward of the composer's approval. In this regard, the textural combinatoriality noted and graded in the matrices in *Formalized Music* and the score of *Duel* represent the sense of inevitability of the pair of opposites: a determination for following a set of arbitrary rules will be rewarded, whereas the material itself is regulated so that no exact combinations will return, thus avoiding (in Xenakis' view) the potential repetitiveness of stochastically generated material, and, furthermore, creating a new juxtaposition at every turn.

In conclusion, I have argued that Xenakis's music actively seeks a connection with larger philosophical questions. In this case, I have focused on the diverse readings of his philosophy of music in light of a) an aesthetics of music which encompasses the formalized tendencies and the aspects which clearly hint at affinities with the *informel* I have expounded elsewhere; and b) a compositional technique which draws on the idea of montage in the form of self-borrowing. In

this regard, Xenakis can be understood, as I argue in conjunction with a number of authors, to argue for a philosophy of *becoming*, rather than static *being*. This can be seen at work at the level of musical time, and the way in which Xenakis developed it. On the one hand he argues for a restoration of the *outside-time* category, whilst on other he expands the *in-time* by drawing on various elements planned beforehand. These include elements, objects and textures, borrowed and transformed from his other compositions, often contemporary, sometimes over the course of several years. Furthermore, his music philosophy allows for a reading of the works in dialectical terms, and reveals a thorough engagement with the pressures and demands of contemporary society. Xenakis did not only have a wide-ranging interest in the sciences and arts of his day, he also attempted to draw on traditional aspects of this culture which he saw as forgotten or wrongly excised from memory. The idea that music is a simple unfolding in time was brought to a halt in his work, in order to force the audience and the student of his work to re-engage and open the view of history, nature and art. The modernist musical artwork underwent considerable transformations in his hands and throughout his career, from artefact and traditional form, to progress; the works themselves argue for their own vibrancy as mediations of subject and object, intuition and rationality, in an age when this was no longer thought possible.

## CONCLUSION

Aesthetics, which historically categorised the arts as either plastic or temporal, had to adapt to the transformation of the *duality* of space and time, to a more *interrelated* approach. In this regard, a major conceptual change was effected in the twentieth century. Modernist artworks challenged the notion of the chronological unfolding of time as the ‘natural’ state of affairs. This change in the conception of time, no longer an isolated aspect – a ‘given’ factor as it were, which simply flows until the end of the composition – became a focal point in the theoretical and compositional strategies of twentieth-century composers of different stylistic and artistic backgrounds and convictions. In fact, the spatialization of musical time, which Wagner signalled in the famous scene between Gurnemanz and Parsifal, before the grail scene in the first act of *Parsifal*: ‘Du siehst, mein Sohn,/ zum Raum wird hier die Zeit’ (‘You see, my son,/here time becomes space’), became an important modernist *problem*. The problematic relationship between time and space, or the ‘rationalization’ and ‘reification’ of musical time refers – as Adorno argued in *Philosophy of New Music* – to the ‘pseudomorphosis of music and painting,’ essentially a critique of Wagner, Debussy and Stravinsky. However, as Gianmario Borio, Albrecht Wellmer and others averred, this lineage became the basis for the modernist *alternative* in the post-war period to the integral serialist compositional technique – which Adorno too saw as an essentially totalizing system. In the period before *integral* serialism, composers such as Edgard Varèse had attempted to bring compositional technique in line with the demands of the historical musical material, but in a different way to the explicitly ‘progressive’ line Adorno had distinguished and theorized. Varèse’s conception of time and space was specifically developed to avoid the arbitrarily closed tonal and dodecaphonic compositional ‘systems.’ In his view, moreover, it was not sufficient to replace one such system (tonality, even in its expanded post-romantic version) with another one (dodecaphony, with its insistence on using all 12 chromatic tones). Additionally,

an important aspect of Varèse's compositional approach is in his treatment of *timbre*. In contrast to the merging of timbres (*Schmelzklang*) as propounded by romantic and symphonic composers, Varèse offered a separation of timbres (*Spaltklang*), stressing the individuality of the different instruments, including percussion instruments.

In a later development of the importance and emancipation of the notion of timbre, as Gianmario Borio noted, a focus on *texture* became paramount. The composers studied in the last two chapters of this thesis theorized this idea from two different angles: one is intuitive, the other formalizing. However, as I have argued, both approaches expand the compositional-technical arsenal by keeping a balance, if not a dialectic, between both of these tendencies. In this regard, their music forms artistic testimony to the idea that a progressive music according to Adorno's criteria is possible, even if it meant that the reification of the material, by this stage rather fragmented, had to be reforged under these different circumstances. One element of this dialectic of rationalization and intuition can be found in the idea that the artwork as *image* becomes more pronounced at the level of the work itself: the notion that not only the listener or viewer receives a musical artwork as a *dialectical* image, but that the works themselves have a (silent) say in this matter. In this sense, Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image as an alternative to traditional forms of philosophical interpretation, conceptualization and systematic forms of *reading* can be seen to have influenced Adorno's late *Aesthetic Theory*. In it, he further develops the idea of a new art, which in terms of music revolves around the notion of *musique informelle*, which had to overcome the notion the mechanical compositional technique of the historically 'necessary' integral serialist music of the 1950s. However, as I have argued, with Borio, the utopian elements, combined with a certain nostalgia, had barred Adorno from touching upon the actual developments in the music around 1960. As a way to remedy this flaw, I propose to unveil a number of the aspects of Adorno's aesthetics which heavily reference, both

explicit and implicit, Benjamin's work. These theories includes Benjamin's critique of traditional philosophies of history and time, his theory of a language of objects, and the notion of the dialectical image. The latter fuses the artwork as object with its interpretation, in a sense giving an insight in the work in a way which does not simply propound a subjectification of the work as an extension of one's consciousness and hence dependent or *dominated*. In another sense, the work of art is allowed to reveal something true about the reified state of the contemporary consciousness, social and individual. Feldman's work in this regard reveals techniques which borrowed concepts from abstract painting, specifically Abstract Expressionism, into his notion of the *instrumental image*. Xenakis too borrowed, but in his case it consists of montages of self-borrowed fragments from his own compositions.

However, Adorno's aesthetic 'preferences' were thrown into a new light in the period after the Second World War, with the explosion of new artistic and musical styles. In this environment, Adorno reached back to concepts he had discussed with Walter Benjamin, before the war. Especially Benjamin's conception of history, progress, and experience of art objects, informed this renewal of Adorno's own aesthetics. Although not a one-way influence, Adorno's interpretation of Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image – as found in his unfinished *Arcades Project*, building on earlier conceptualisations of the image – developed this at both a theoretical and practical level. On the one hand, Benjamin's theorizations of the image had never been purely abstract, but functioned as an interpretative strategy. As Benjamin himself had developed the image – as allegorical image, and *image-in-thought* (*Denkbild*) – into an image that can be *read*, the dialectical image became a central philosophical concept for Adorno. Adorno's reading of musical works was transformed into an interpretation of their appearance as an *image-to-be-read*. This reading then, takes into account not only the score (as a graphic representation), but also the performance. The experience of music as fleeting, then, is momentarily arrested, brought to a

halt in a moment of illumination (or understanding) – this moment is unique, as both the object as well as the experience of it form a unique constellation, never to be repeated. However, as Benjamin had already understood, this moment of temporary illumination could be fashioned into an account – contributing ultimately to an understanding of the object-in-motion with the subject’s consciousness-in-motion. In other words, the import of the experience of art becomes knowledge. What is to be ‘known’ in this reading of the art object, is a revelation of its content. The fragmentary works, as attempts to give form to the ‘chaos’ (to paraphrase Beckett), reveals itself as unconscious historiography. The (mediated) interaction between composer and musical material, for example, in the work of Iannis Xenakis, reveals the tension between formalization and intuition. Agostino Di Scipio reads this as a means of protection against what Max Weber (and Adorno) called ‘means-ends’ rationalization. This avoidance of reification – in the form of totalizing compositional system – draws at the same time on the *technical* means at the disposal of a twentieth-century composer. In other words, the art object which wants to avoid the complete reified state of the *culture* object (*Kulturobject*) must draw – in Xenakis and Varèse’s eyes – on precisely these formalising strategies seemingly antithetic to the strived-for openness. Attempts to read Xenakis’s work only as an illusory play of formulaic elements, fails to understand the actual compositional strategy, which is built on the treatment of musical elements, objects and textures. As Gibson has shown, this strategy relies (almost secretively) on the borrowing of earlier compositional materials, re-forming them by using the technique of montage, framing them in a new musical context. This process of montage draws on graphic techniques, including the so-called *arborescence*, but also on computer-graphical interfaces (for example, the UPIC-system developed by Xenakis, where one can draw the overall form, as well as the individual sound-curves). This process is one of internal spatialization; however, as Adorno fears, the disappearance of the ‘tools’ with which to compose these works would constitute a *negation* of their history. In that sense, it becomes important to recognise these technical means as part-and-

parcel of the composition itself. In this way, the image presented by the composition cannot be reduced to the score, but needs to take into account the sketches and other preparatory materials; this is what Xenakis calls the ‘outside-time’ level of the compositional process, in contrast the ‘in-time’ – time unfolding in the composition itself.

For Feldman, the absolute categorization of time and space had to be challenged in the same way that the idea of perspective in Western art, a dominant concept since the Renaissance. In his *Between Categories*, he sets out to distance himself from traditional conceptualizations of the musical work of art. By doing so, Feldman developed his own approach to the composition of music, supported by a significant philosophical interest in the work of, amongst others, Henri Bergson.

The aesthetic of the *informel* was never fully developed by Adorno, but interestingly – given his earlier vehemence against music-as-pseudo-painting – rested on the aesthetic assumptions of French and German painters of the so-called *art informel*; they were rather presumptuously connected by a French art curator by the name of Michel Tapié – which in his view included the American Abstract Expressionists – another ‘collective’, as proposed by, amongst others, Clement Greenberg. Adorno’s late writings indicate the future of music by drawing on this form of art, however, not literally by proposing music-as-painting, but by analogy in the understanding of (open) form. Musical form had always been at the centre of Adorno’s critique, but as *musique informelle*, it proved most fruitful. Similar to Benjamin’s understanding of history from the actuality of the present (the ‘Now’), in an ever-changing constellation between the (art) object and the subject who experiences, Adorno referred to the openness of atonal composition in the *Idealtyp* of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (1909-1924). However, as Gianmario Borio points out, this expectation is not a nostalgic one, but should be seen as Adorno’s critical evaluation of the

current (late 1960's) state of musical composition, to be developed into a full-blown aesthetics of the *informel*.

In this thesis, I have shown that Adorno's aesthetics can fruitfully be read in light of the music and art of his time and that beyond the original scope of his work, it can be further seen as a contribution to the study of modernism in general and the modernist artwork in particular. The argument for a form of reading against the grain of some of the concepts studied in this thesis can be upheld and expanded even further in light of other composers mentioned in passing, as well as many others. I would argue here for a study of the work of such composers as Helmut Lachenmann, Luigi Nono, Bernd Alois Zimmermann and many others who have drawn inspiration from Adorno's and Benjamin's work. It is not only certain that the work of these authors and composers is full of tensions and challenges to the status-quo, but the aesthetic and philosophical relevance of the work of Benjamin and Adorno remains paramount in the study of any avant-garde modernist work, and beyond. Now and in the future, those aspects of contemporary and past artworks which seems second nature to us, will light up in a flashlike manner to reveal that which lies beneath the illusion of acceptability, normalcy and marketability, in a *dialectical* image.



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